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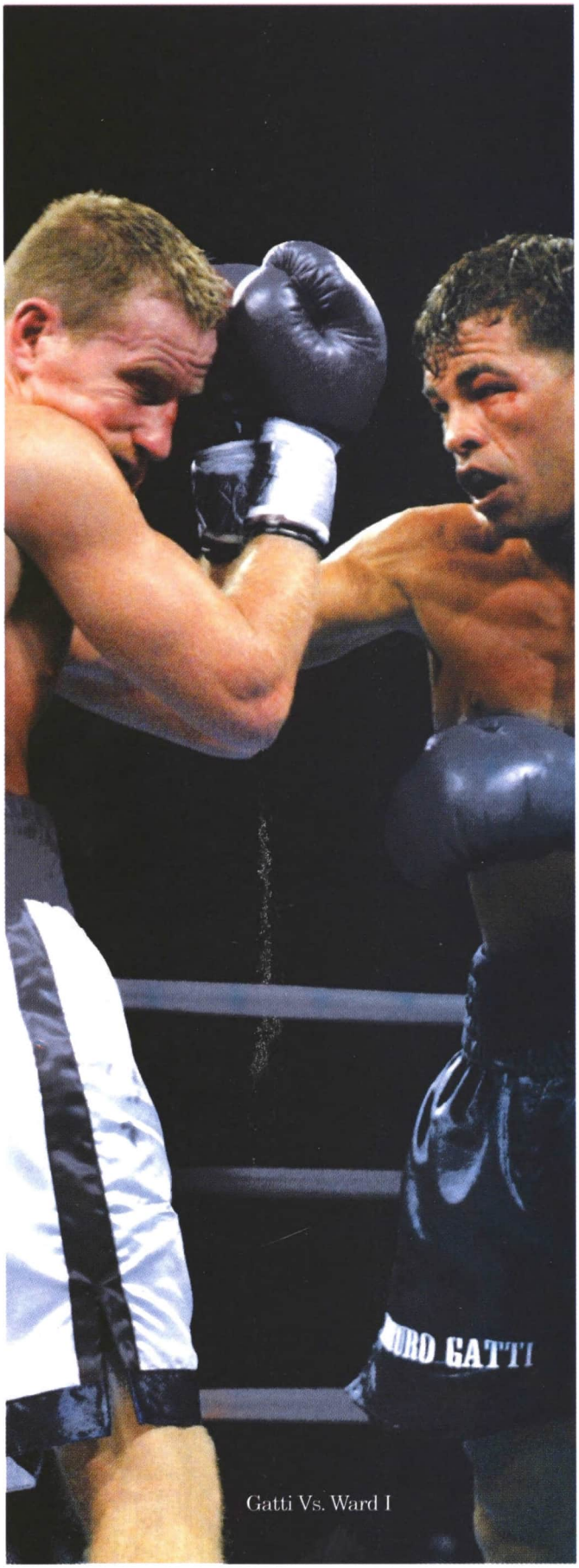

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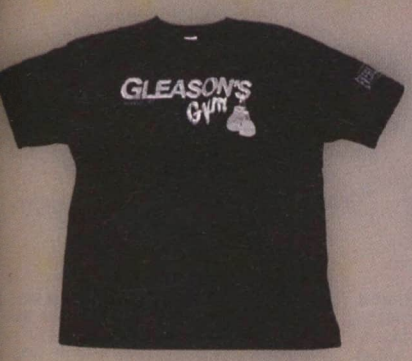

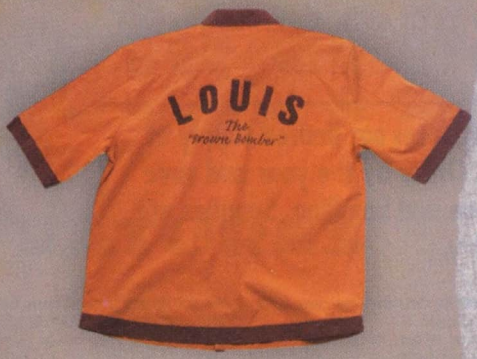

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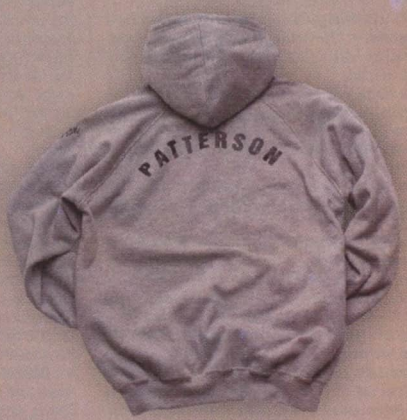

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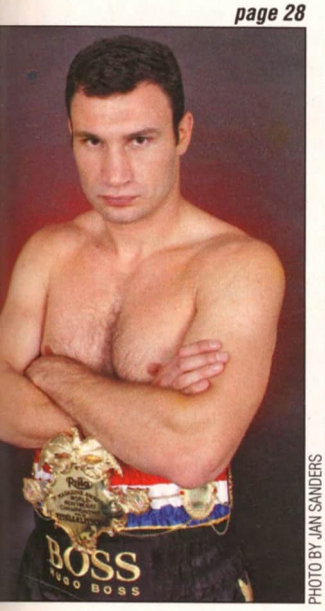

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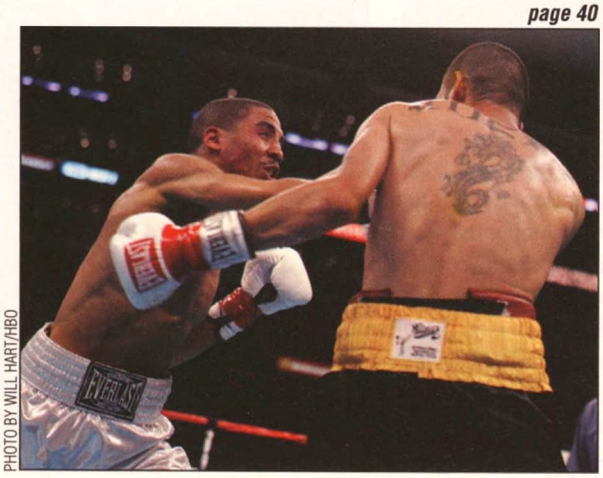

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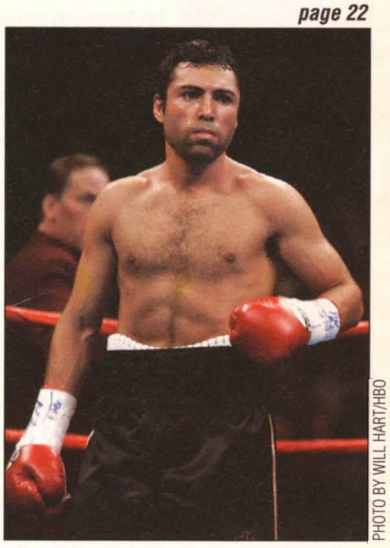

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RINGSIDE

Due to luck and geography, members of THE RING staff have been fortunate enough to spend quite a bit of time with middleweight champion Bernard Hopkins over the years. And while he's certainly ruthless in the ring and ornery at the bargaining table, Bernard can be fun to hang out with. He even lets you get a word in every now and then. But more than anything else, THE RING's relationship with "The Executioner" has afforded us private peeks into his unique personality, a personality that has allowed him to persevere and prosper in the face of odds that would have crushed lesser men.

There's no pretension with Hopkins, no publicist trying to keep you at arm's length or telling you when your time with the champ is up. He's as accessible now as when he was defending his title on ESPN for $100,000, even though he earned 100 times that for knocking out Oscar De La Hoya. And when Hopkins visited THE RING in early-January for a photo shoot, there was no limo, no entourage, just Hopkins and his aide-de-camp James Fisher in a sedan.

The first thing you notice about Hopkins is that his intensity hasn't diminished one iota despite his new tax bracket. He wasn't at the office two minutes before launching into an impassioned rant about everything from his ongoing legal wrangling with Don King to his new partnership with Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions.

Another constant with B-Hop is his unswerving belief in himself and his own way of doing things. Basically, he feels that he has the boxing establishment by the shorthairs and, regardless of any difficulties with King, a lucrative rematch with Felix Trinidad is as close to a sure thing as there is in the fight game.

But Hopkins' assured attitude doesn't mean he's on cruise control. Bernard was an underdog for so long, he still thinks like one. A few days after visiting, he opened training camp for his bout with number-one contender Howard Eastman, which will be over by the time you read this.

While some folks might have figured his 20th title defense would be little more than a formality, Hopkins was not one of them. He told me that he knew Eastman was a tough guy with good skills and plenty of kick in his right hand, and he wasn't about to take the Englishman for granted. In fact, Hopkins lugged an armload of video footage of Eastman to camp with him so that he and trainer Bouie Fisher could, as they have for more than a decade, develop several battle plans tailored to this particular opponent.

There's been absolutely no letup as Hopkins enters the final phase of his career, but the finish line is within sight. Before his mother died a year or so ago, Hopkins promised her he would retire when he was 40. He reached that milestone on January 15, so he has approximately 12 months remaining to achieve his final fistic goals. If he's still on top this time next year, there will be plenty of temptation to keep going, but my guess is that Bernard will honor his promise.

You can tell an awful lot about a man by watching the way he handles himself in a boxing match, and it's equally true that you can discover a lot about a fighter by observing the way he conducts himself outside of the ring. You really can't separate the two; they're mirror images of the same person, and Bernard Hopkins is the sort of man who likes to look everybody straight in the eye, including himself.

Nigel Collins
Editor-in-Chief

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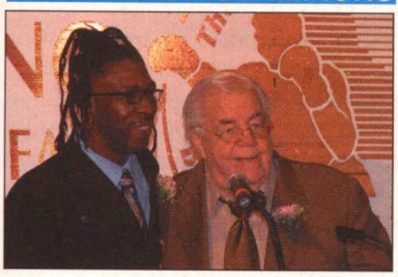


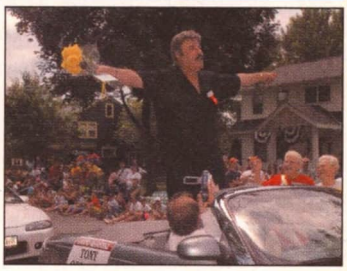
Reminiscing . . . Livingstone Bramble and Lou Duva share fight stories with Banquet crowd.

FIST CASTING

Everlasting . . . Fist cast by George Foreman.

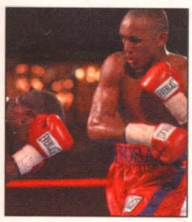
PARADE OF CHAMPIONS

Marvelous . . . Marvin Hagler waves to fans.



Hooray . . . Grand Marshal Tony Orlando enjoys fans along Parade route.

CELEBRITY BOXING NIGHT



VICTORIANO SOSA

Fight Night . . . Popular boxers featured in action-packed bouts at Turning Stone Casino Resort.

MUSEUM GROUNDS

Autographs . . . George Foreman spends time signing autographs on the Museum grounds.

5K RACE, FUN RUN

Finish Line . . . "Irish" Micky Ward in stride.

Go . . . Ken Norton officially starts race of celebrity boxers and runners.

INDUCTION CEREMONY

A Moment in Time . . . Qawi, Peltz, Nelson, Zaragoza, Palomino, and Christodoulou proudly display their rings.

BOXING CARD SHOW

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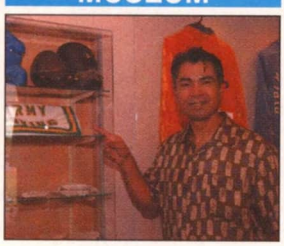
GOLF TOURNAMENT

Chip . . . Gerry Cooney (l) chips onto 18th green while Sir Henry Cooper (r) is enroute to next tee.

COCKTAIL PARTY

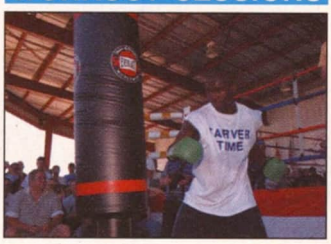
Stars . . . Boxers and fans enjoy VIP cocktail party reception.

MUSEUM



Carlos Palomino points to his boxing robe on display.

WORKOUT SESSIONS



Antonio Tarver working the heavy bag during a public workout.

RINGSIDE TALKS

Having Fun. . . Frank Bruno and Bert Sugar team up for a ringside lecture.

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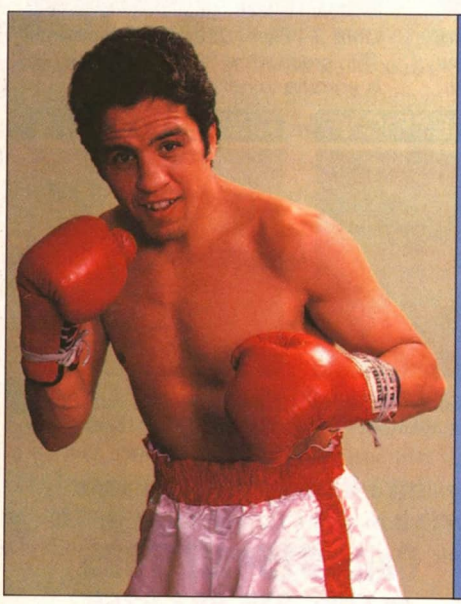
ROUND ONE

FIFTEEN MORE TO CROWD THE HALL'S HALLS

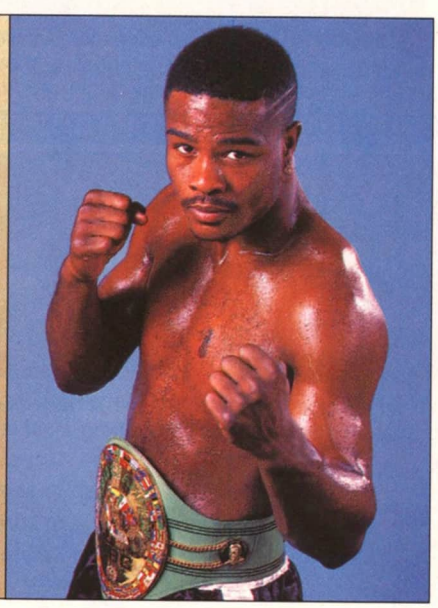
One week after baseball's Hall of Fame let in Wade Boggs and Ryne Sandberg while keeping arguably deserving Hall candidates Bruce Sutter, Jim Rice, and Goose Gossage out, the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York, showed its relative leniency, opening its doors to 15 new Hall of Famers. Experts can debate endlessly whether the Hall of Fame's insistence on inducting four fighters in the "modern" category every year is hurting the IBHOF's reputation as a home for the true legends of the sport; regardless, January brought joyous news for four living ex-fighters, two living non-participants, and the families and friends of nine late greats who made the cut.

Every decade from the '50s through the '90s is represented in the fighting primes of the four pugilists voted in as part of the Hall's marquee category. Looking at them chronologically, the inductees include Italy's **Duilio Loi**, 115-3-8 (26), a top lightweight contender of the 1950s who moved up to junior welter and enjoyed two world title reigns in the early-'60s, the first title win coming at the expense of Hall of Famer Carlos Ortiz; featherweight and super featherweight titlist **Bobby "Schoolboy" Chacon**, 59-7-1 (47), one of the most popular fighters of the '70s and '80s and the victor in THE RING's Fight of the Year in both 1982 and '83; 1980s featherweight beltholder **Barry McGuigan**, 32-3 (28), who ended the lengthy reign of Hall of Famer Eusebio Pedroza and will become the first Irishman inducted in the "modern" category; and three-time 154-pound titlist **"Terrible" Terry Norris**, 47-9 (31), who defeated 16 titleholders, including Sugar Ray Leonard, in a career spanning from the late-'80s to the late-'90s.

Four fighters will be inducted in the "Old-Timers" category: **Eugene Criqui**, 99-17-14 (53), who topped Johnny Kilbane for the featherweight title in 1923; **Joe Lynch**, 71-17-12 (38) with 57 no-decisions, who held the bantamweight title from 1920-'21; **Charles "Bud" Taylor**, 70-23-6 (35) with 58 no-decisions, who outpointed Tony Canzoneri for the NBA bantamweight title in 1927; and **Marcel Thil**, 113-22-13 (54), who held the generally recognized version of the middleweight title from 1932-'37. **Jack Randall**, 16-0-1, who fought in the early 19th century and is known as "The Original Nonpareil," will be the lone inductee in the "Pioneer" category.



Bobby Chacon



Terry Norris

There will be three new Hall of Famers in both the "Non-Participant" and "Observer" category. Representing the former will be manager and fight film collector **Bill Cayton**, Filipino manager/promoter **Lope "Papa" Sarreal**, and California matchmaker and promoter **Don Fraser**. The latter category will include fighter-turned-writer (and RING staffer) **Jersey Jones**, longtime editor of Britain's *Boxing News* **Harry Mullan**, and former RING Editor-in-Chief **Bert Randolph Sugar**.

All six of the living inductees—Chacon, Loi, McGuigan, Norris, Fraser, and Sugar—are expected to attend the June 9-12 induction weekend in Canastota. For more information, contact the IBHOF at (315) 697-7095, or look them up on the Web at www.IBHOF.com.

—Eric Raskin

THE BOXING BOOKSHELF

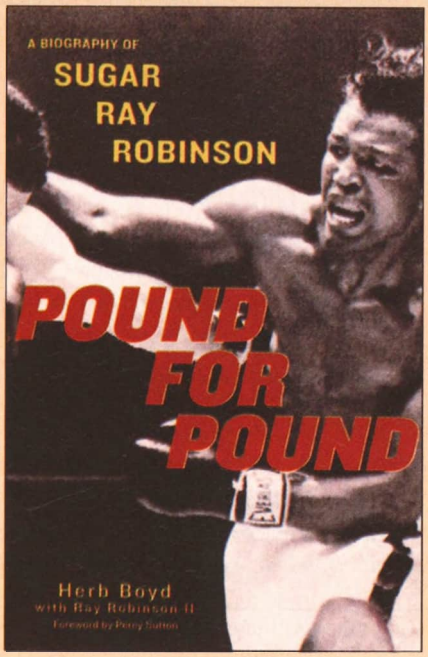
The life of Sugar Ray Robinson has been well-chronicled, though not as frequently as one might have expected. So into the mix now comes *Pound For Pound: A Biography Of Sugar Ray Robinson* (Amistad Press, 300 pages, $24.95).

This effort by author Herb Boyd, an activist/writer commonly associated with the civil rights movement, is well-meaning but inconsistent. Boyd tends to spend too much time on seemingly unimportant incidents in Robinson's life while shortchanging moments of more significance to boxing fans, which it can be assumed would make up the majority of the book's readers.

Lack of detail abounds. Only one or two sentences are devoted to several of Sugar Ray's important fights, and what little is said on these fights seems to be thrown in merely as asides. The author, however, finds room to devote plenty of verbiage to more trivial matters such as the amount and styles of clothing worn by Robinson's second wife, Edna Mae. Indeed, there is enough on the former Mrs. Robinson in this work to make one wonder if it was a biography on her.

It is understood that fewer witnesses may be alive today to provide anecdotes on the life of boxing's greatest warrior, but surely there are still enough survivors and historians, such as Hank Kaplan and the oft-quoted Herb Goldman and Bert Sugar, just to name a few, to have given us more insight into what others thought of Robinson's bouts, his domestic abuse of Edna Mae, and other parts of his life outside the ring, including his post-retirement years.

Inaccuracies are also prevalent throughout Boyd's work. For example, he writes of the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota inducting Robinson in 1967, when the Hall was not even opened until 1989. Boyd also tends to digress with stories about Joe Louis that, though brief, distract the reader from the main subject matter. While there are fair comparisons to be made between Louis and Robinson regarding their ring prowess, popularity, and falls from grace, it would



make more sense for Boyd to stick to the matter at hand.

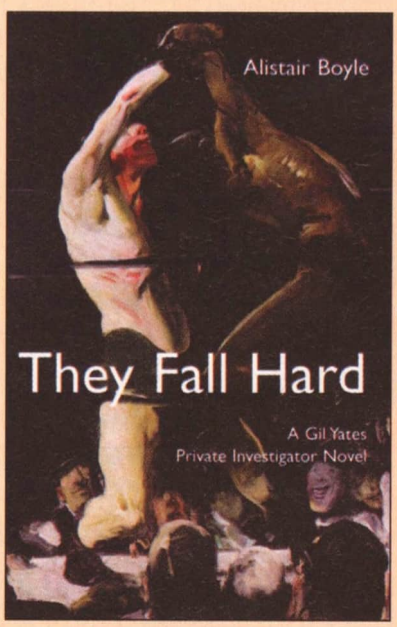
While there are still some interesting items to be culled from *Pound For Pound*, the reader would be better served to read it only as an accompaniment to the more polished autobiography, *Sugar Ray*, co-written by renowned sportswriter Dave Anderson.

—Mike Greenhill

The obvious question that comes to mind concerning *They Fall Hard* (Allen A. Knoll Publishers, 227 pages, hardcover, $23) is why, instead of using for cover art a 1909 George Bellows painting of two ancient, bi-racial bruisers, the publisher didn't go with a mock-up of that famous shot of Muhammad Ali standing over Sonny Liston in the 1965 "phantom punch" kayo in Lewiston, Maine. That would have been a natural, since the mystery the protagonist sets out to unravel in Alistair Boyle's eighth "Gil Yates Private Investigator Novel" is whether Liston took a dive in that infamous one-round debacle, and if he was murdered for it later. Only the names and a few minor details have been changed in this mildly entertaining but not-very-ringwise treatment of one of boxing's most puzzling and thorny controversies.

The novel is set in the present, when the dying illegitimate son of the late heavyweight champion Buddy Benson (Liston) hires Yates to investigate his father's fights with Abu "The Mouth" Hambali (guess who?) and the needle-hating Benson's subsequent death by drug overdose, which occurred 30 years earlier. The trail leads Yates—who apparently is on the payroll of his father-in-law's real estate company but spends all of his time solving crimes, making up his own weird versions of tired cliches, and planting palm trees—to thinly veiled incarnations of Ali and his fighting daughter, Laila; humble and monastic Floyd Patterson; Bible-toting George Foreman; and various grizzled towel-slingers, gangsters, Black Muslims, and Vegas rats. There's also a retired FBI agent who somehow couldn't manage in his whole career to put together what Yates is able to figure out in a week or so.

Apparently, the Yates books are among the most popular issued by the self-described small-press publisher of "books



for intelligent people who read for fun." I haven't seen the others, but this one isn't as quirky and droll as it tries to be, and the punches are as telegraphed as a Rocky Balboa right hook.

—Pete Ehrmann

TV FIGHTS OF THE MONTH

DATE	WINNER/LOSER	NETWORK	DIVISION	SIGNIFICANCE	MATCHUP	RESULT
12-16-04	Librado Andrade KO 4 Thomas Reid	HBO L	lh	C+	B-	C+
Well-worn Reid a decent test for fast-rising Andrade						
12-16-04	Brian Viloria KO 7 Angel Priolo	HBO L	fl	B-	B+	B
Vilora proves again that if you can't stop a guy hitting him on the jaw, try going to his body; good win						
12-17-04	Manuel Gomez W 10 Christopher Henry	Telef	m	B-	B-	C+
Maybe Gomez never wins a world title, but doesn't he deserve another shot at one?						
12-17-04	Mike Arnaoutis KO 3 Jauquin Gallardo	Show	jw	C+	B	B-
Arnaoutis another success story for ShoBox*; this kid can fight*						
12-17-04	Ebo Elder KO 12 Courtney Burton	Show	l	B-	B+	A
Apparently Jesus watches Showtime; who knew?						
12-17-04	Gerson Guerrero KO 6 Jair Jimenez	Telem	jb	C	A-	C+
Not quite the barnburner the first match was, but good enough until Guerrero's uppercut all but ended it						
12-18-04	Andre Ward KO 2 Chris Molina	HBO	sm	C+	C	C+
Olympic gold medalist Ward has made a quick and impressive transition to a pro style						
12-18-04	**Glen Johnson W 12 Antonio Tarver**	**HBO**	**World lh**	**A+**	**A**	**A-**
Maybe Tarver should have gotten it, but with all the rounds he took off, how can you feel sorry for him?						
1-6-05	Alfredo Angulo W 4 Tomas Padron	HBO L	m	C-	B	B
Angulo suffers a bad cut and barely wins his pro debut; not the way you want to start						
1-6-05	Abner Mares KO 2 Luis Malave	HBO L	jf	C	B	C+
Mares has no trouble in pro debut taking out 14-fight veteran; good for him						
1-6-05	Fulgencio Zuniga KO 12 David Lopez	HBO L	m	B-	B-	B+
Upset! Zuniga loses almost every round before starching Lopez						
1-7-05	Isidro Granados W 8 Johnny Nolasco	Telef	f	C-	B+	B
Good hard scrap; we could watch these two prospects go at it every week						
1-7-05	Danny Perez W 10 Dewey Welliver	Telef	m	C+	C-	C
Isn't it wrong that a guy named "Dewey" should have a chin like this guy has?						

Category Explanation: "Significance"—The importance of the bout to the division and the fighters' futures; "Matchup"—The quality of the fighters and the prefight determination of how their styles will mesh; "Result"—How the bout turned out, from the viewer's perspective.

(RING championship fights in **bold** type)

Division key: h—heavyweight; c—cruiserweight; lh—light heavyweight; sm—super middleweight; m—middleweight; jm—junior middleweight; w—welterweight; jw—junior welterweight; l—lightweight; jl—junior lightweight; f—featherweight; jf—junior featherweight; b—bantamweight; jb—junior bantamweight; fl—flyweight; jfl—junior flyweight; s—strawweight

Network key: PPV—Pay-Per-View; Show—Showtime; FOXSN—Fox Sports Net; Uni—Univision; Telef—Telefutura; Telem—Telemundo; HBO L—HBO Latino

JACK NEWFIELD, 1938-2004

Muckraking journalist Jack Newfield, a passionate foe of injustice who fought as hard for civil rights as he did for the rights of boxers, passed away at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center in Manhattan on December 20. A lifelong New Yorker, Newfield, 66, was ringside for Felix Trinidad-Ricardo Mayorga on October 2, two weeks before he was diagnosed with kidney cancer.

Although Newfield was the author of 10 books, best known to boxing fans was *Only In America: The Life And Crimes Of Don King*. He also won an Emmy for his documentary *Don King: Unauthorized*. His autobiography, *Somebody's Gotta Tell It: The Upbeat Memoir Of A Working-Class Journalist,* was published in 2002.

On the morning it was announced that the movie rights to the King book were purchased by HBO, Newfield was in a federal court house covering King's trial for income tax evasion. He found himself standing at a urinal next to King when the wild-haired promoter bellowed: "Jack Newfield! I just read in the newspaper that I'm feeding your whole f---ing family."

Newfield was not afraid to take strong stances against powerful foes, including King and former New York City mayors Ed Koch and Rudy Giuliani. He also had an eclectic group of friends whom he regularly invited to his Greenwich Village home to view old boxing films. They included boxing notables, actors, writers, politicians, judges, and workingmen.

Boxing historian Mike Silver says Newfield's greatest accomplishments had nothing to do with the sport he referred to as a "guilty pleasure." In the '70s, Newfield exposed widespread abuse in nursing homes, and also reported on the dangers to children of lead paint in city buildings. The latter led to a change in the law that saved countless lives.

Newfield is survived by his wife, Janie Eisenberg, and two children, Rebecca and Joseph.

—Robert Mladinich

PHOTO BY JAMES HAMILTON

Newfield: Dies of cancer at 66

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OUTSIDE THE ROPES

Spadafora: Pleads guilty to lesser charge

Facing attempted homicide charges for the shooting of his then-girlfriend, former lightweight titlist **Paul Spadafora** pleaded guilty in late-December to the lesser charge of aggravated assault, and it is expected that he'll serve between nine months and two years in prison. Sentencing was scheduled for February … In sad news, two ring legends went missing recently, and neither had been located yet as we went to press. **Alexis Arguello**, who has a history of drug abuse, disappeared from his native Nicaragua in late-December, even though he was scheduled to take office as the vice mayor of Managua on January 15. And according to the Mexican sports publication *Esto*, **Carlos Zarate**, who has fallen on hard times financially, has been missing since mid-December. Former Zarate rival **Alfonso Zamora** has been leading the charge to find the former bantamweight champ … Junior welterweight **Floyd Mayweather** failed to show up for his misdemeanor assault trial in mid-December for his participation in a bar fight a year earlier, so a warrant was issued for his arrest. Two weeks later, Mayweather turned himself in, paid a $200 fine, went free on a $10,000 personal recognizance bond, and was scheduled to face trial in February … The intriguing case of heavyweight **Joe Mesi** took a couple of turns at the end of December. First, Mesi admitted that he suffered bleeding on his brain from his March '04 fight with **Vassiliy Jirov**, but said that a neurological expert told him he's healed and is at no greater risk than any other fighter. Then, days later, Mesi sued the Physicians Imaging Center of Western New York for allegedly releasing his MRI results to the New York State Athletic Commission without his permission … **Vernon Forrest's** comeback can't seem to get off the ground, as the former welterweight champ's health continues to be an issue. Forrest, who hasn't fought since July '03, had to have rotator cuff surgery in late-December … **Hector "Macho" Camacho** was charged in early-January with the November burglary of a Gulfport, Mississippi, computer shop, as well as with drug possession. Camacho, who proclaimed his innocence, was out on bail as of press time … Onetime lightweight prospect **Calvin Davis** pleaded guilty in early-January to federal felony drug-trafficking charges, meaning he'll probably get a sentence of about 10 years—far less than if he'd pled innocent and been found guilty … An Armani store in New York sued **Don King** in late-December for allegedly charging more than $96,000 worth of clothes, returning about $22,000 worth, and never paying for the remainder … ESPN announced in late-December plans for a made-for-TV movie based on the life of heavyweight legend **Jack Johnson**. The film is expected to air sometime in 2005 … Congratulations to bantamweight **Veerapol Sahaprom**, who was named the best Thai professional athlete of 2004 by the Sports Authority of Thailand … Junior middleweight fringe contender **Joszef Matolcsi** was stabbed in his hometown of Debrecen, Hungary, in early-January, but is expected to make a full recovery. Details on the identity of the assailant or the possible motive were unknown as of press time … There was a ring death in late-December, as junior featherweight **Abdul Tebazalwa** of Uganda died of head injuries in a Nairobi, Kenya, hospital after being knocked out in the third round by **Anthony Napunyi**. Limited records suggest Tebazalwa came into the fight with a ledger of 4-0 (3).

Camacho: Claims innocence on burglary charge

THE PUNCHLINES

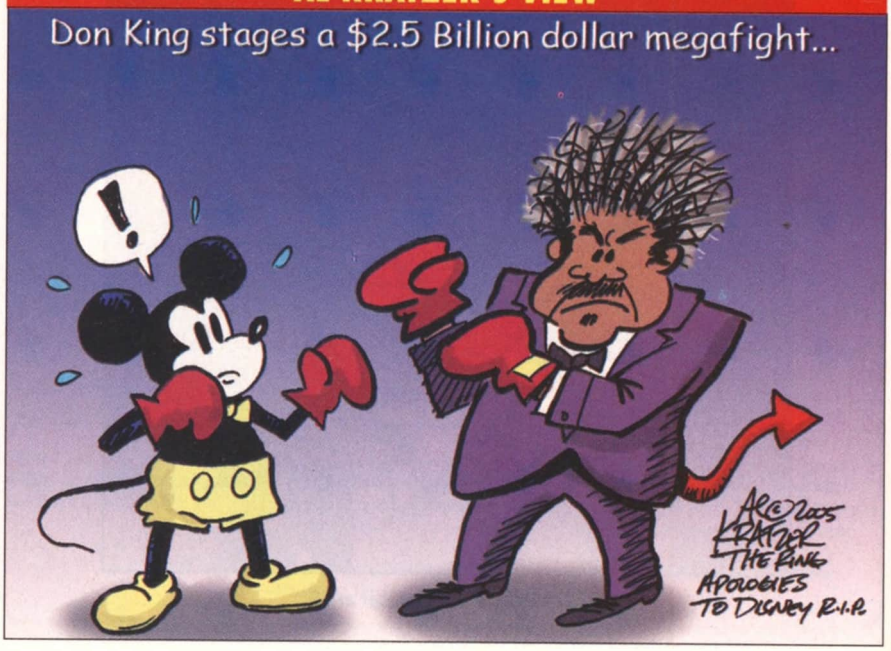
"I haven't even written 2005 on a piece of paper yet, and the filth of this business has already sullied this year."

—Promoter Lou DiBella, reacting to the controversial decision that went against his fighter, Jose Navarro, when he faced Katsushige Kawashima on January 3 in Tokyo

"It is totally amateur, and I am pissed off about it."

—British promoter Frank Warren, the undisputed king of announcing fights before they're signed, attacking Kostya Tszyu for prematurely announcing that a fight with Warren fighter Ricky Hatton had been finalized

AL KRATZER'S VIEW



"THE BIBLE OF BOXING"

RATINGS ANALYSIS

POUND-FOR-POUND

1. **BERNARD HOPKINS**
   Middleweight
2. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Junior Welterweight
3. **KOSTYA TSZYU**
   Junior Welterweight
4. **WINKY WRIGHT**
   Junior Middleweight
5. **MANNY PACQUIAO**
   Featherweight
6. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ**
   Featherweight
7. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
   Junior Lightweight
8. **ERIK MORALES**
   Junior Lightweight
9. **GLEN JOHNSON**
   Light Heavyweight
10. **ANTONIO TARVER**
    Light Heavyweight

(For period ended January 12, 2005)

HEAVYWEIGHTS: No changes.

CRUISERWEIGHTS: No changes. The new date for the twice-postponed bout between Wayne Braithwaite (number one) and Jean-Marc Mormeck (number two) for the vacant RING cruiserweight championship was uncertain as of press time.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: No changes. Champion Glen Johnson and number-one contender Antonio Tarver have tentatively agreed to a rematch, but no date has been set yet.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No changes.

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: Champion Bernard Hopkins should have defended against number-one contender Howard Eastman by the time you read this. Number-two rated Oscar De La Hoya says he plans to drop down to welterweight, but as De La Hoya's most recent bout was at middleweight, he remains ranked among the 160-pounders until his next fight.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS: No changes.

WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS: No changes.

LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: No changes.

FEATHERWEIGHTS: Champion Manny Pacquiao is scheduled to fight Erik Morales on March 19 at 130 pounds. Therefore, Pacquiao's 126-pound title will not be at stake. If, however, Pacquiao decides to continue to campaign exclusively as a junior lightweight, the featherweight title will become vacant.

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Art Simonyan (ninth last issue) exits following his kayo loss to third-ranked Israel Vazquez. Simonyan's departure pushes up Daniel Ponce DeLeon from 10th to ninth, and makes room for Nedal Hussein at number 10.

BANTAMWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS: Jose Navarro's close split-decision loss to number-one rated Katsushige Kawashima elevates Navarro from the 10th to the seventh position. Navarro's advancement forces down Masamori Tokuyama (seventh last issue) and Fernando Montiel (eighth last issue) one spot each. Felix Machado (ninth last issue) departs because he has not fought in more than a year. This makes room for Eric Morel to enter at number 10.

FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS: No changes.

STRAWWEIGHTS: No changes.

POUND-FOR-POUND: No changes. ■

THE RING RATINGS

For Period Ended January 12, 2005

How Our Ratings Are Compiled

Fighters recognized as champions by THE RING are rated at the top of their division, with the top 10 contenders listed below.

Championship vacancies can be filled by winning a box-off between THE RING'S number-one and number-two contenders, or, in certain instances, a box-off between our number-one and number-three contenders.

The only three occasions when a fighter will lose his championship status are when he retires, moves to another weight division, or is defeated in a championship bout.

Ratings By The Editors

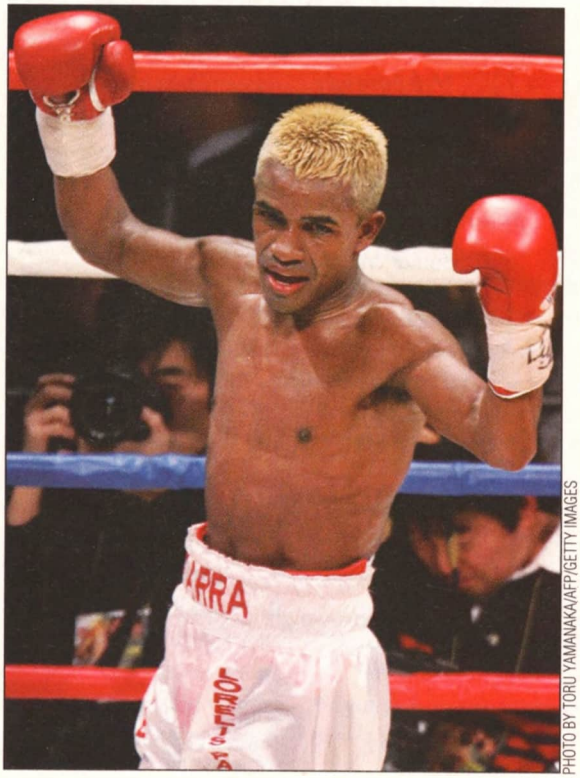


PHOTO BY TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Lorenzo Parra maintained his number-two ranking at flyweight by outpointing Trash Nakanuma

HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Unlimited

Champ: VITALI KLITSCHKO
Ukraine 35-2 (34)

1. **CHRIS BYRD** Flint, MI 38-2-1 (20)
2. **JOHN RUIZ** Methuen, MA 41-5-1 (28)
3. **HASIM RAHMAN** Baltimore, MD 40-5-1 (33)
4. **JAMES TONEY** Ann Arbor, MI 68-4-2 (43)
5. **MONTE BARRETT** Queens, NY 30-3 (16)
6. **ANDREW GOLOTA** Poland 38-5-1 (31)
7. **FRES OQUENDO** Puerto Rico 24-3 (15)
8. **JAMEEL McCLINE** Port Jefferson, NY 31-4-1 (19)
9. **CORRIE SANDERS** South Africa 40-3 (30)
10. **LAMON BREWSTER** Los Angeles, CA 31-2 (27)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 154 pounds

Champ: WINKY WRIGHT
St. Petersburg, FL 48-3 (25)

1. **KASSIM OUMA** W. Palm Beach, FL 20-1-1 (13)
2. **SHANE MOSLEY** Pomona, CA 39-4 (35)
3. **VERNO PHILLIPS** Aurora, CO 38-9-1 (20)
4. **DANIEL SANTOS** Puerto Rico 29-2-1 (20)
5. **TRAVIS SIMMS** Norwalk, CT 24-0 (18)
6. **JAVIER CASTILLEJO** Spain 58-5 (40)
7. **RODNEY JONES** Lafayette, LA 34-3 (22)
8. **KOFI JANTUAH** Las Vegas, NV 28-1 (18)
9. **BRONCO McKART** Monroe, MI 47-6 (31)
10. **ALEJANDRO GARCIA** Mexico 28-1 (28)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 126 pounds

Champ: MANNY PACQUIAO
Philippines 39-2-2 (30)

1. **JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 43-2-1 (33)
2. **SCOTT HARRISON** Scotland 23-2-1 (13)
3. **INJIN CHI** South Korea 29-2-1 (18)
4. **ROCKY JUAREZ** Houston, TX 22-0 (15)
5. **MANUEL MEDINA** Mexico 63-14 (29)
6. **ZAHIR RAHEEM** Tulsa, OK 25-1 (15)
7. **MICHAEL BRODIE** England 35-2-1 (23)
8. **CHRIS JOHN** Indonesia 34-0-1 (19)
9. **SPEND ABAZI** Denmark 31-1 (10)
10. **NICKY COOK** England 24-0 (14)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 122 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **OSCAR LARIOS** Mexico 54-3-1 (35)
2. **MAHYAR MONSHIPOUR** France 26-2-2 (17)
3. **ISRAEL VAZQUEZ** Mexico 37-3 (28)
4. **JOAN GUZMAN** Dominican Republic 22-0 (17)
5. **JOSE LUIS VALBUENA** Venezuela 24-3-1 (14)
6. **JORGE LACIERVA** Mexico 26-5-5 (18)
7. **SALIM MEDJKOUNE** France 43-5-1 (21)
8. **YODDAMRONG SITHYODTHONG** Thailand 40-2-1 (18)
9. **DANIEL PONCE DELEON** Mexico 22-0 (21)
10. **NEDAL HUSSEIN** Australia 36-2 (22)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 118 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **RAFAEL MARQUEZ** Mexico 33-3 (30)
2. **VEERAPOL SAHAPROM** Thailand 46-1-2 (32)
3. **RATANACHAI VORAPIN** Thailand 58-8 (39)
4. **GENARO GARCIA** Mexico 32-4 (20)
5. **CRUZ CARBAJAL** Mexico 24-12-1 (20)
6. **TOSHIAKI NISHIOKA** Japan 24-4-3 (14)
7. **SILENCE MABUZA** South Africa 17-0 (15)
8. **RICARDO VARGAS** Mexico 36-10-3 (11)
9. **JHONNY GONZALEZ** Mexico 26-4 (24)
10. **JULIO ZARATE** Mexico 21-2-1 (13)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 200 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **WAYNE BRAITHWAITE**
   Guyana 21-0 (17)
2. **JEAN-MARC MORMECK**
   France 30-2 (21)
3. **JOHNNY NELSON**
   England 44-12-2 (29)
4. **O'NEIL BELL**
   Atlanta, GA 23-1-1 (22)
5. **KELVIN DAVIS**
   Reno, NV 21-2-1 (16)
6. **CARL THOMPSON**
   England 33-6 (25)
7. **STEVE CUNNINGHAM**
   Philadelphia, PA 16-0 (9)
8. **VIRGIL HILL**
   Bismarck, ND 49-5 (23)
9. **DALE BROWN**
   Canada 32-3-1 (20)
10. **PIETRO AURINO**
    Italy 31-2 (14)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 175 pounds

Champ: GLEN JOHNSON
Miami, FL 42-9-2 (28)

1. **ANTONIO TARVER**
   Orlando, FL 22-3 (18)
2. **ZSOLT ERDEI**
   Hungary 21-0 (13)
3. **ROY JONES**
   Pensacola, FL 49-3 (38)
4. **JULIO GONZALEZ**
   Huntington Beach, CA 37-2 (23)
5. **DARIUSZ MICHALCZEWSKI**
   Germany 48-1 (38)
6. **CLINTON WOODS**
   England 36-3-1 (22)
7. **FABRICE TIOZZO**
   Franco 46-2 (30)
8. **PAUL BRIGGS**
   Australia 23-1 (17)
9. **THOMAS ULRICH**
   Germany 27-1 (19)
10. **RICO HOYE**
    Detroit, MI 18-0 (14)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 168 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JOE CALZAGHE**
   Wales 38-0 (30)
2. **MIKKEL KESSLER**
   Denmark 35-0 (27)
3. **ANTHONY MUNDINE**
   Australia 22-2 (17)
4. **ANTWUN ECHOLS**
   Davenport, IA 31-5-1 (27)
5. **DANNY GREEN**
   Australia 19-1 (18)
6. **JEFF LACY**
   St. Petersburg, FL 18-0 (14)
7. **MADS LARSEN**
   Denmark 45-2 (37)
8. **ROBIN REID**
   England 37-4-1 (27)
9. **MARKUS BEYER**
   Germany 31-2 (12)
10. **MANNY SIACA**
    Puerto Rico 18-5 (16)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 160 pounds

Champ: BERNARD HOPKINS
Philadelphia, PA 45-2-1 (32)

1. **HOWARD EASTMAN**
   England 40-1 (35)
2. **OSCAR DE LA HOYA**
   Los Angeles, CA 37-4 (29)
3. **FELIX STURM**
   Germany 22-1 (10)
4. **FELIX TRINIDAD**
   Puerto Rico 42-1 (35)
5. **JERMAIN TAYLOR**
   Little Rock, AR 22-0 (16)
6. **ROBERT ALLEN**
   Atlanta, GA 36-5 (27)
7. **MASELINO MASOE**
   New Zealand 26-2 (25)
8. **KINGSLEY IKEKE**
   Canada 21-1 (11)
9. **SAM SOLIMAN**
   Australia 29-7 (11)
10. **WILLIAM JOPPY**
    Washington, D.C. 34-4-1 (25)

WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 147 pounds

Champ: CORY SPINKS
St. Louis, MO 34-2 (11)

1. **ANTONIO MARGARITO**
   Mexico 30-4 (21)
2. **ZAB JUDAH**
   Brooklyn, NY 32-2 (23)
3. **THOMAS DAMGAARD**
   Denmark 34-0 (26)
4. **MICHELE PICCIRILLO**
   Italy 44-2 (27)
5. **MANUEL GOMEZ**
   Mexico 27-10-1 (19)
6. **KERMIT CINTRON**
   Reading, PA 24-0 (22)
7. **JAWAID KHALIQ**
   England 23-1-1 (13)
8. **CARLOS BALDOMIR**
   Argentina 40-9-6 (12)
9. **TEDDY REID**
   Adelphi, MD 22-6-1 (16)
10. **COSME RIVERA**
    Los Angeles, CA 27-7-2 (19)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 140 pounds

Champ: KOSTYA TSZYU
Australia 31-1 (25)

1. **ARTURO GATTI**
   Jersey City, NJ 38-6 (29)
2. **VIVIAN HARRIS**
   Brooklyn, NY 25-1-1 (17)
3. **FLOYD MAYWEATHER**
   Grand Rapids, MI 32-0 (21)
4. **SHARMBA MITCHELL**
   Washington, D.C. 55-4 (31)
5. **MIGUEL COTTO**
   Puerto Rico 22-0 (18)
6. **RICKY HATTON**
   England 38-0 (28)
7. **DeMARCUS CORLEY**
   Washington, D.C. 29-3-1 (16)
8. **LOVEMORE NDOU**
   Australia 39-7-1 (25)
9. **JESSE JAMES LEIJA**
   San Antonio, TX 47-6-2 (19)
10. **OKTAY URKAL**
    Germany 34-3 (10)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 135 pounds

Champ: JOSE LUIS CASTILLO
Mexico 51-6-1 (45)

1. **DIEGO CORRALES**
   Las Vegas, NV 39-2 (32)
2. **JOEL CASAMAYOR**
   Miami, FL 31-3 (19)
3. **JUAN LAZCANO**
   El Paso, TX 33-3-1 (25)
4. **JULIO DIAZ**
   Coachella, CA 30-2 (22)
5. **JUAN DIAZ**
   Houston, TX 26-0 (12)
6. **ACELINO FREITAS**
   Brazil 36-1 (31)
7. **JAVIER JAUREGUI**
   Mexico 48-11-2 (34)
8. **ARTUR GRIGORIAN**
   Uzbekistan 37-1 (23)
9. **JULIEN LORCY**
   France 56-4-2 (41)
10. **LAKVA SIM**
    Mongolia 19-4-1 (16)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 130 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**
   Mexico 59-4 (41)
2. **ERIK MORALES**
   Mexico 47-2 (34)
3. **JESUS CHAVEZ**
   Mexico 40-3 (28)
4. **YODSANAN NANTHACHAI**
   Thailand 43-2-1 (35)
5. **CARLOS HERNANDEZ**
   Bellflower, CA 41-4-1 (24)
6. **JORGE BARRIOS**
   Argentina 42-2-1 (30)
7. **CASSIUS BALOYI**
   South Africa 30-1 (16)
8. **MIKE ANCHONDO**
   La Puente, CA 25-0 (18)
9. **ROBBIE PEDEN**
   Australia 24-2 (13)
10. **MZONKE FANA**
    South Africa 22-2 (8)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 115 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **KATSUSHIGE KAWASHIMA**
   Japan 28-3 (18)
2. **MARTIN CASTILLO**
   Mexico 27-1 (16)
3. **LUIS PEREZ**
   Nicaragua 22-1 (14)
4. **IVAN HERNANDEZ**
   Mexico 19-0-1 (13)
5. **ALEXANDER MUNOZ**
   Venezuela 25-1 (24)
6. **MARK JOHNSON**
   Washington, D.C. 44-4 (28)
7. **JOSE NAVARRO**
   Los Angeles, CA 21-1 (9)
8. **MASAMORI TOKUYAMA**
   North Korea 30-3-1 (8)
9. **FERNANDO MONTIEL**
   Mexico 29-1-1 (23)
10. **ERIC MOREL**
    Madison, WI 34-1 (18)

FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 112 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **PONGSAKLEK WONJONGKAM**
   Thailand 54-2 (28)
2. **LORENZO PARRA**
   Venezuela 25-0 (17)
3. **VIC DARCHINYAN**
   Australia 22-0 (17)
4. **MZUKISI SIKALI**
   South Africa 29-4-2 (17)
5. **IRENE PACHECO**
   Colombia 29-1 (22)
6. **OMAR NARVAEZ**
   Argentina 18-0-2 (12)
7. **ROSENDO ALVAREZ**
   Nicaragua 33-2-2 (21)
8. **BRAHIM ASLOUM**
   France 17-0 (6)
9. **HUSSEIN HUSSEIN**
   Australia 26-1 (20)
10. **BRIAN VILORIA**
    Waipahu, HI 16-0 (10)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 108 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **JORGE ARCE**
   Mexico 38-3-1 (28)
2. **VICTOR BURGOS**
   Mexico 37-13-3 (22)
3. **BEIBIS MENDOZA**
   Colombia 29-3 (23)
4. **NELSON DIEPPA**
   Puerto Rico 21-1-2 (12)
5. **PICHIT SIRIWAT**
   Thailand 30-2 (14)
6. **FAHLAN SAKKREERIN**
   Thailand 50-4-2 (20)
7. **JOSE AGUIRRE**
   Mexico 33-2-1 (20)
8. **KERMIN GUARDIA**
   Colombia 35-4 (21)
9. **ULISES SOLIS**
   Mexico 14-1 (10)
10. **ROBERTO VASQUEZ**
    Panama 18-1 (15)

STRAWWEIGHTS
Weight Limit: 105 pounds

Champ: Vacant

1. **YUTAKA NIIDA**
   Japan 17-1-3 (8)
2. **MUHAMMAD RACHMAN**
   Indonesia 49-7-3 (21)
3. **DANIEL REYES**
   Colombia 34-2-1 (29)
4. **IVAN CALDERON**
   Puerto Rico 21-0 (4)
5. **ISAAC BUSTOS**
   Mexico 24-6-3 (13)
6. **EAGLE KYOWA**
   Japan 13-1 (5)
7. **JUAN LANDAETA**
   Venezuela 15-3-1 (13)
8. **CHANA PORPAOIN**
   Thailand 51-2-3 (17)
9. **NOEL ARAMBULET**
   Venezuela 20-3-1 (10)
10. **RODEL MAYOL**
    Philippines 19-0 (15)

RYAN OUT LOUD

By Jeff Ryan

FAST FOOD FOR THOUGHT

If your trusty columnist were a hip-hop artist, he'd probably be known as 2 Cent because it's always been hard for me to resist putting my two cents in about anything. A few recent items in the news got my typing fingers very itchy, so as Danny Williams once said to a phalanx of WBC officials as the crane was lowering him to the scale, kindly allow me to weigh in.

•THE RING names Glen Johnson its Fighter of the Year: The esteemed editors of the publication you're holding got it wrong this year. Sure, there's a temptation to pick somebody new, and it's always neat to see an underdog come out of nowhere to take the honors, a la Adrien Brody beating out Jack Nicholson for an Oscar. Nonetheless, Johnson's selection, which was echoed by the New York *Daily News* and others, is the result of giving the light heavyweight king too many benefits of the doubt.

Bernard Hopkins (yawn, if you'd like) again deserved the honor he originally won in 2001. The middleweight great fought only twice, but that second win was a one-punch, bodyblow knockout of Oscar De La Hoya, a future Hall of Famer who hadn't been stopped in 40 fights. True, De La Hoya wasn't a natural 160-pounder, but he was eight years younger than the 39-year-old Hopkins and, hey, he was Oscar De La Hoya.

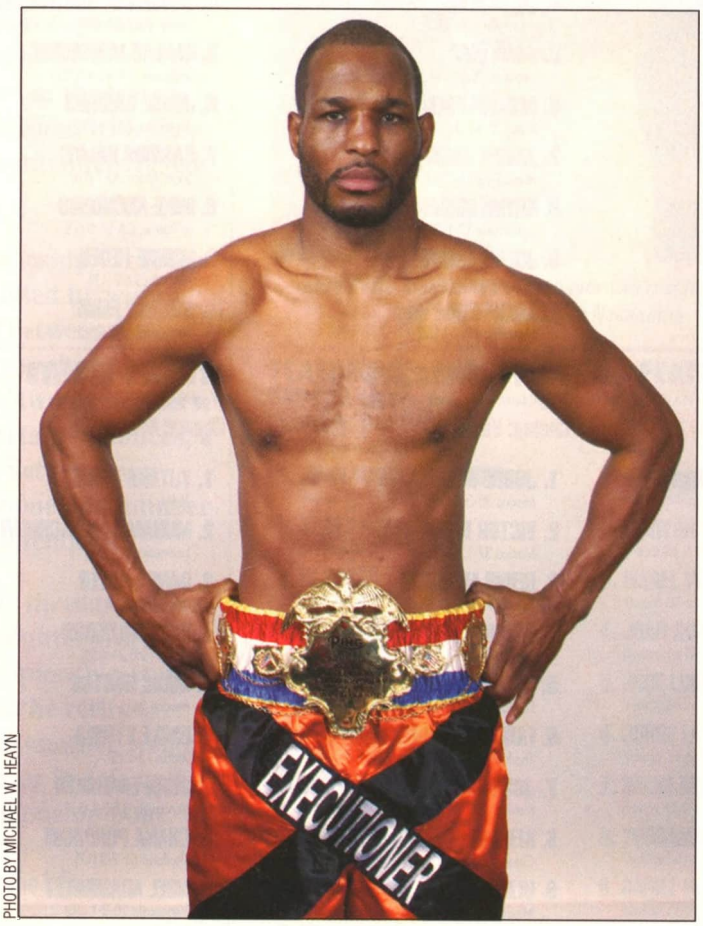


PHOTO BY MICHAEL W. HEAYN

Ryan's choice for 2004's Fighter of the Year

In my view, Johnson's victories in'04 were overrated. All too often we hear that Fighter A was "softened up" by Fighter B before Fighter A got blasted into the stratosphere by Fighter C. Well, in the case of Roy Jones' knockout defeat to Johnson, that's indeed true. Jones was coming off a confidence-killing one-punch flattening by Antonio Tarver when he went straight to Johnson without a tuneup. Does anyone who saw Jones fight tentatively and be rendered unconscious before he hit the canvas against Johnson really believe he bore any resemblance whatsoever to the Jones that Tarver beat?

Yeah, Johnson outpointed Clinton Woods for some meaningless alphabet strap. Big deal. When you throw in the fact that Johnson's win over Tarver came via split decision, and that some observers—including the Associated Press, the New York *Daily News*, and the author of "Ryan Out Loud"—thought Tarver deserved a slight edge, it's difficult to understand handing Johnson the laurels.

Maybe it isn't the sexy pick, but THE RING should have given Hops his props. He's still tops at an age when we should be calling him "Pops."

•Paul Spadafora pleads guilty: On October 26, 2003, the former IBF lightweight titlist and his girlfriend, Nadine Russo, had a lovers quarrel. It began when Russo reportedly drove Spadafora's Hummer SUV into a median strip in Pittsburgh, flattening two tires. It ended when the fighter shot her. (Ah, kids these days.) Isn't it frightening to think what might have happened had Russo done something *really* egregious, like misplace the frequent-buyer card from Spadafora's favorite tattoo parlor?

Russo recovered from her injuries and not only refused to testify against Spadafora, but even got engaged to him and bore him a son, Geno. (If only my former girlfriends were half that forgiving for transgressions like smiling at a cute waitress.) Allegheny County prosecutors, however, charged "The Pittsburgh Kid" with attempted homicide and reckless endangerment, felonies that could have landed him in prison for 17 years. As part of a deal, Spadafora pled guilty to aggravated assault and weapons charges and, as we went to press, was facing up to three years in jail when sentenced.

Spadafora's attorney, William Difenderfer, admitted his client had cocaine and alcohol problems, and said he expected a sentence of about two years. For the 29-year-old Spadafora, such a period of inactivity (he's fought just twice in a little more than two years) would be crippling. How stupid to toss away the prime of his career at a time when Kostya Tszyu, Floyd Mayweather, and Arturo Gatti reside in the same 140-pound neighborhood. If he goes away for a couple of years, Spadafora the fighter will never be the same as a stylist or a commodity.

The only winners in this sad story are the cops of the "Steel City," who probably feel relieved that Spadafora is off the streets for a while. He has, after all, become a pain in their necks. So much so, in fact, that rumor has it they were thinking of renaming their paddy wagon the Spaddy wagon.

•HBO tells the heavyweights, "Don't call us, we'll call you": Not since Dean Wormer put the Delta House fraternity on "double secret probation" in *Animal House* has a group of underachieving slobs been censured the way the heavyweight division has by HBO Sports boss Ross Greenburg. The fed-up Greenburg says HBO is taking a break from airing the big boys. In other words, just because the cable giant has money to burn doesn't mean that it has to burn it on something that's going to release a toxic cloud.

A combination of factors led to the decision, including the absence of a unified alphabet champion, the dreadful Madison Square Garden card in November that highlighted the shortcomings of IBF king Chris Byrd and WBA ruler John Ruiz, and a poor buy rate that saw HBO Pay-Per-View lose about $2-million on the Williams-Vitali Klitschko bout. Greenburg indicated that HBO probably wouldn't return heavyweight fights to its schedule until the road to unification has been mapped out to the network's approval.

Because HBO's deep pockets have been so beneficial to the fight game, we almost forget sometimes that the cable behemoth is in business to make money and draw viewers, not to do the sport a favor or throw it a lifeline whenever it badly needs exposure or an outlet for its latest mismatch. HBO isn't like a commercial network locked into a long-term contract with the NBA, then stuck with the NBA Finals no matter how unappealing the matchup. The cable network can pick and choose what to feature.

How would you like a pair of trunks just like Norton's?

And HBO has chosen to remain "The Network Of Champions," not "The Network Of Paper Champions And Klitschko's Sacrificial Offerings." Greenburg made a good call.

•Sales of "throwbacks" continue to grow: It's no longer just rap stars and rich pro athletes who are decked out in those $300 replica jerseys. It's sports fans of all ages and income levels, some of whom look as though they chose wearing that 1974 Kentucky Colonels road jersey over buying food this month. (Though, to tell you the truth, there are a few items from the Cooperstown Collection that tempt me to live on Chef Boyardee canned ravioli for a couple of weeks.)

Mitchell & Ness, the Philadelphia-based leader in the throwbacks industry, produces old-time baseball, football, basketball, and hockey uniforms. But its great untapped market is boxing. That's right, boxing. Think of all the possibilities for throwback trunks. The red Muhammad Ali wore and the green Joe Frazier made famous during their superfight at Madison Square Garden. Ken Norton's trademark blue with the monogrammed "KN." George Foreman's red trunks with the blue waistband and white stripes. The green-and-yellow trunks that advertised "Super Malta" and were worn by Roberto Duran in his second fight with Esteban DeJesus. The red-and-white striped "Amandla" trunks Sugar Ray Leonard donned for his rematch with Thomas Hearns. Even the gold Kronk trunks Hearns turned into a classic.

Robes would also make a great gift for the sports fans that have everything, don't you think? There's Marvin Hagler's blue robe with the tiny crowns sewn on it, Gerry Cooney's green version with a shamrock on the back, or, if someone really wants to max out their American Express card, a replica of the glittery robe Elvis Presley gave Ali as a gift. All you Philly seamstresses, get busy! ■

CAMERA CLICKS

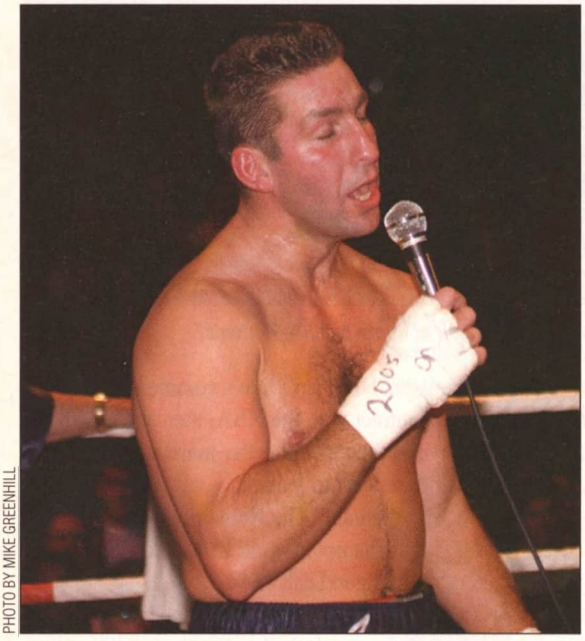


PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

Like a modern-day Rinty Monaghan, super middleweight Eric Lucas appears to be serenading the crowd after a December victory. Actuality, Lucas was just thanking the thousands who turned out in his native Montreal to blow their money on his two-round mismatch against Tony Menefee.

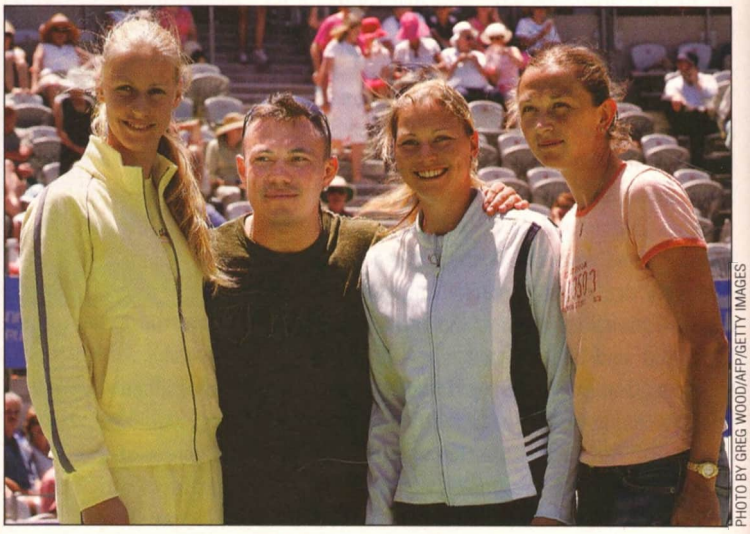


PHOTO BY GREG WOOD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Junior welterweight champ Kostya Tszyu isn't the only heavy-hitting Russian export. Here, he poses with three of his native land's top female tennis players, (from left) Elena Dementieva, Nadia Petrova, and Elena Likhovtseva, at a January tennis event in his current home, Sydney, Australia.

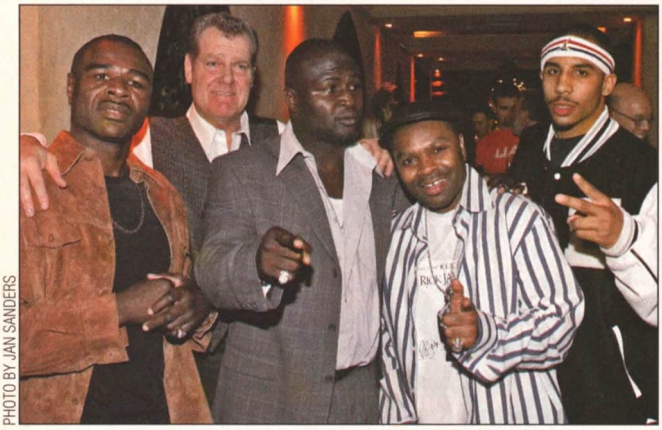


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

This was definitely the party to be at on December 18. There were plenty of happy faces to be seen at this postfight gathering, including Glen Johnson (who'd just beaten Antonio Tarver for the light heavyweight title), his promoter Dan Goossen, heavyweight James Toney (another Goossen fighter), manager James Prince, and Prince's latest acquisition, Andre Ward, who made a successful pro debut on the undercard. The party attended by Tarver and Ward-victim Chris Molina was decidedly less festive.

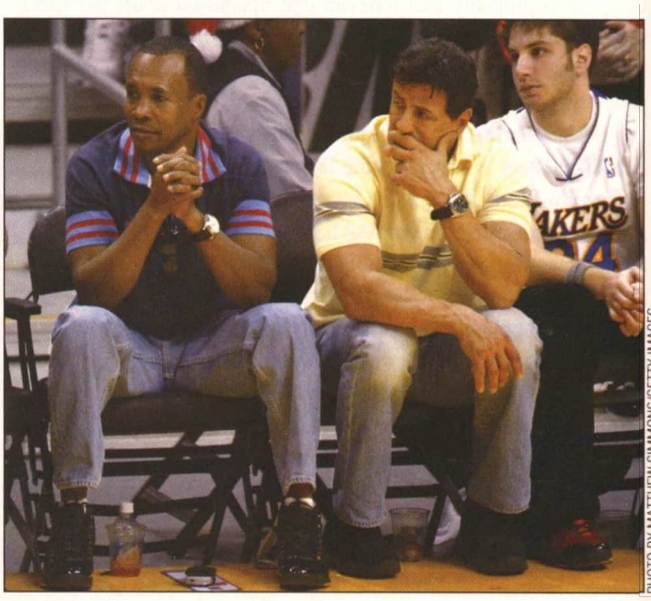


PHOTO BY MATTHEW SIMMONS/GETTY IMAGES

Judging by the expressions on Sugar Ray Leonard and Sylvester Stallone's faces, being a Los Angeles Lakers fan isn't as much fun as it used to be. The two stars of The Contender *were on hand at the Christmas Day showdown against Shaquille O'Neal and the Miami Heat, and, no, they weren't planted there by the NBA to discourage players from entering the stands and fighting with fans.*

PHOTO BY ROBERT LABERGE/GETTY IMAGES

Ronnie Smith didn't give Vinny Maddalone much of a run for his money in dropping a shutout decision in Los Angeles in December, but he is giving Butterbean a run for his money in the worst-physique-in-boxing competition. The 5'10½" Smith, who has now lost seven straight and 23 of his last 25, weighed in at a career-high 298 pounds for the bout with Maddalone.

PHOTO BY MIKE GREENHILL

Looking like a cross between a scuba diver and a Williams sister, DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley furthered his reputation as boxing's wackiest dresser prior to his December fight against Darryl Tyson in Washington, D.C. The debate rages among fashion experts as to whether this mask compliments or clashes with Corley's Victoria's Secret underwear.

NOSTALGIA CORNER

Is "Old Blue Eyes" about to turn into "Old Black Eyes"? Fortunately for Frank Sinatra, Esteban DeJesus was just playing around in this photo taken a week before his January 21, 1978, rubber match with Roberto Duran for the world lightweight title. And unfortunately for DeJesus, he didn't get to do it "My Way" against Duran, losing by 12th-round kayo at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

NEW FACES

JASON LITZAU

Junior Lightweight

By Joe Santoliquito

PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Everything was a hustle. From the way Jason Litzau used to romp in water fountains to gather up loose change for lunch, dinner, and bus fare, to running scams on local bar patrons, hawking stolen candy bars for a buck. It's what Litzau had to do to survive. His life was trailer park material, filled with alcohol and drug abuse, a real-life version of rapper Eminem's *8 Mile*.

Only sometimes it was a lot worse than living in a trailer park. Like the time he had to sleep in the staircase of an apartment complex. Or when he and his older brother, Allen, bravely stepped out into East St. Paul, Minnesota, a pair of kids around 10 years old running away from home and an abusive stepfather, bus-hopping in the middle of the night to be with their biological father, who lived in a cramped, one-bedroom apartment and had problems of his own.

Some life.

If Litzau had one constant to depend on, one positive in his life from which he could derive even a glint of a future, it was boxing. The sport provided Litzau with something close to stability, giving him discipline as well as life experience. Now Litzau is looking to boxing to give him the popularity and riches that are only bestowed on a rare few.

The way Litzau sees it, he's already special. He endured unbelievably harsh times to reach the age of 21, and here he is with a 13-0 (13) record and the attention of such big-time promoters as Main Events. The 5'9" junior lightweight beanpole has already received some prime airtime on ESPN2's *Friday Night*

(Continued on page 61)

PRO RECORD

2002		
Nov. 16	Magnus Blackmer, St. Paul, MN	KO 1
2003		
Feb. 8	Eloy Varos, Las Vegas	KO 4
April 25	Daniel Schleinz, St. Paul	KO 3
June 13	Omar Vega, Norman, OK	KO 1
Sept. 19	Rodney Jones, Toms River, NJ	KO 3
Dec. 5	Alexis Barcelay, Virgin Islands	KO 2
2004		
Feb. 20	Nelson Hernandez, St. Paul	KO 1
April 9	Travis Gregory, St. Paul	KO 2
June 18	Isidro Tejedor, St. Paul	KO 2
July 17	Frankie Martinez, Houston, TX	KO 3
Aug. 19	Jesus Perez, St. Paul	KO 5
Nov. 12	Armando Cordoba, St. Paul	KO 3
Dec. 3	Juan Suazo, Atlantic City	KO 6

FIGHTS	WON	LOST	DRAW	KOs
13	13	0	0	13

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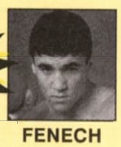

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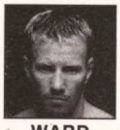

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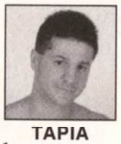

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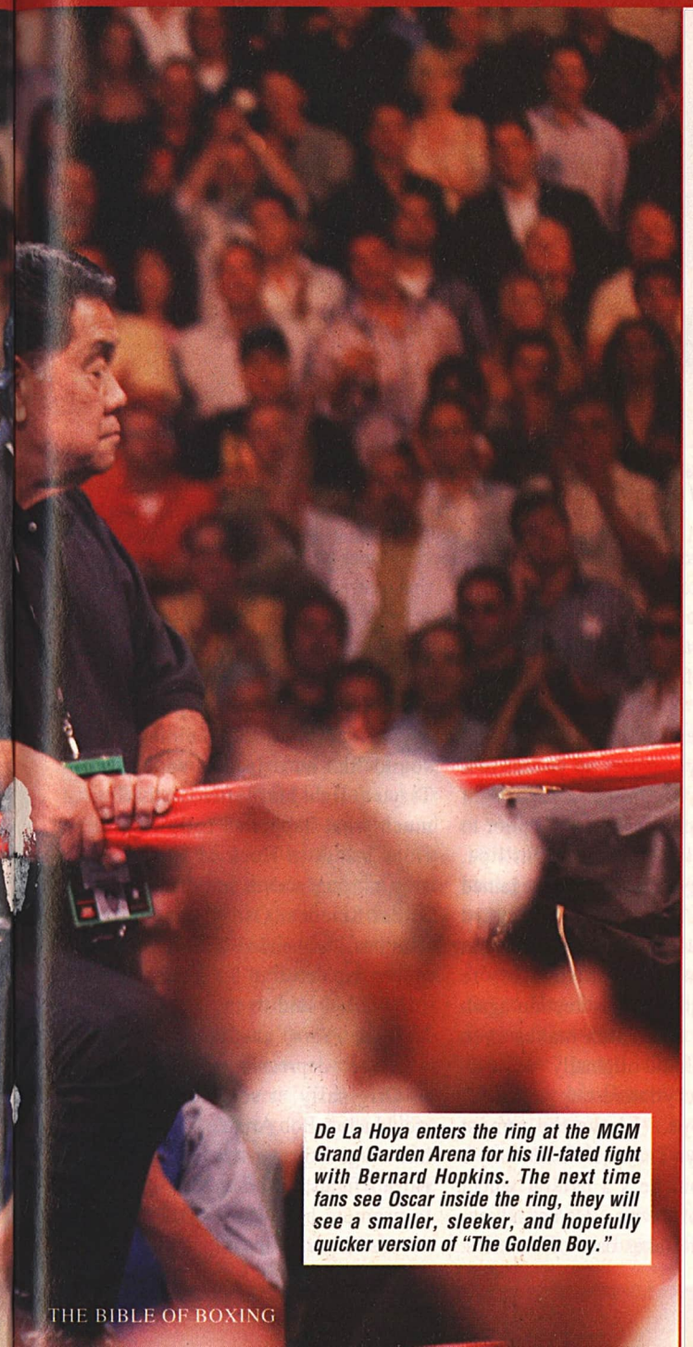
OSCAR DROPS TO 147

What The Move To Welter Means For Him And Boxing

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO



De La Hoya enters the ring at the MGM Grand Garden Arena for his ill-fated fight with Bernard Hopkins. The next time fans see Oscar inside the ring, they will see a smaller, sleeker, and hopefully quicker version of "The Golden Boy."

By Nigel Collins

Revelations don't necessarily hit us all at once; sometimes it takes a while to connect the dots. You might think Oscar De La Hoya had his pugilistic epiphany while he lay on the canvas writhing in agony after being gutted by Bernard Hopkins. But if the formula for renewal was to be found in such a devastating defeat, "The Golden Boy" actually discovered a major clue while preparing for his ill-fated shot at the undisputed middleweight champion. The ninth-round knockout loss simply confirmed his hypothesis.

"Ever since I left welterweight, I've given up the advantage I had in that weight class," De La Hoya told THE RING in early-January. "I lost that little advantage that makes everything work in boxing, and that's speed. Also, at middleweight these guys hit harder. They are walking around at 165, 170 pounds. I have to eat a lot to make 155, so I decided to go back down to welterweight. I can make the weight easy, no problem, and I don't have to starve myself. When I was working out for the Bernard Hopkins fight, I was walking around at 151, 152 pounds without even drying out. I'll still be very, very strong at 147."

It took the first knockout loss of his career for De La Hoya to reach the same conclusion many observers have been drawing for some time now. The evidence has been there all along: In six starts since leaving the welterweight division, De La Hoya has gone 4-2, with only two inside-the-distance wins, both at junior middle. In his two excursions as a full-fledged middleweight, he won a highly debatable decision over Felix Sturm and was thrashed by Hopkins. You don't have to be Einstein to understand that if De La Hoya is going to have a future inside the ring, it will have to come against men his own size.

While it's common for fighters to move up in weight as their careers progress and their bodies mature, it's rare that one reverses direction and drops back down. Perhaps the most famous example was Bob Fitzsimmons, who won the light heavyweight crown *after* losing the heavyweight title. But Fitzsimmons was a small heavyweight to start with, and he also had held the middleweight crown *before* winning the

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

When Hopkins knocked out De La Hoya in the ninth round of their September 2004 showdown, it confirmed the loser's belief that he should shed some weight and drop back down to the 147-pound division. It also prompted him to sign Hopkins to a promotional contract.

heavyweight title. Much like today, fighters back in the early-1900s often fought out of their natural weight class because they could make more money that way. In fact, the man whom Fitzsimmons beat for the 160-pound crown, the original Jack Dempsey, better known as "The Nonpareil," later tried his luck at welterweight, only to be stopped by reigning 147-pound champ Tommy Ryan. Luckily for De La Hoya, he can generate tens of millions of dollars regardless of the division in which he fights.

De La Hoya fighting at welterweight opens the doors for a number of intriguing and, just as important from The Golden Boy's perspective, winnable bouts. For starters there's the winner of the Cory Spinks-Zab Judah rematch, a bout that would give De La Hoya an excellent opportunity to become the undisputed welterweight champion, something he failed to achieve during his original 147-pound campaign. But the possibilities don't stop there.

"It will be interesting because now I'll be watching the 140-pounders and the 147-pounders really closely before making a decision of who I fight next," said De La Hoya.

The mere mention of the 140-pound division instantly conjures up visions of a match with Kostya Tszyu, a superfight that was first touted back in 1997 prior to Tszyu's upset loss to Vince Phillips. While Tszyu stayed at 140 and regained the title, De La Hoya, who also started that year as a junior welter, soon began his gradual climb to 160. Now they're both moving in the same direction again at a time when the match makes even more sense than it did originally.

"It will be very interesting actually," said De La Hoya. "I have the utmost respect for Kostya Tszyu. He's not only a great fighter, but he's a person who I respect outside of the ring. He has a wonderful family. He takes care of business. He's very professional. Kostya Tszyu is the overall package when it comes to being a real star in the sport of boxing. It would be a pleasure for me to step inside the ring with him."

While everything De La Hoya says about Tszyu is true, he almost made it sound like he'd just as soon promote Tszyu as fight him. After all, that's pretty much what happened following De La Hoya's loss to Hopkins. In one of the most unusual moves in the history of the Sweet Science, Oscar signed the man who has just handed him the most comprehensive defeat of his career.

"Well, I said to myself, *if you can't beat 'em, join 'em*," said De La Hoya with a self-deprecating chuckle.

Originally, it seemed that Hopkins would allow Bob Arum's Top Rank, which had staged the vast majority of De La Hoya's fights, including the Hopkins bout, to promote him. But De La Hoya, who severed his relationship with Top Rank

PHOTO BY JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

In his last fight as a welterweight, in March 2001, De La Hoya handed Arturo Gatti an unmerciful beating before referee Jay Nady stopped the fight in the fifth round. If De La Hoya can regain the form he displayed against Gatti, he could very well capture the undisputed welterweight crown.

after the Hopkins fight, offered Hopkins more than just a contract for Golden Boy Promotions to promote his fights. He offered him a piece of the future.

"Hopkins is a very smart man. He realizes he only has a few more fights left in his career," said De La Hoya of his newest recruit. "He's 40 years old, and he feels great, he trains hard, and he's a very dedicated man not only in the sport of boxing, but in his personal life. But he's thinking, *hey, what's after boxing?*

"The great idea we came up with is that we can be partners and do this together and make sure the sport of boxing grows. This is a new generation for boxing. We feel that once the Bob Arums and the Don Kings are gone, there will be a big void, and we want to make sure with Golden Boy Promotions that we have every area covered.

"Bernard Hopkins can be president of East Coast operations, and we'll start signing fighters from the East Coast. He has a nephew, Demetrius Hopkins, who will be the first fighter we will sign in our partnership. It's exciting. Things can only go up for us, and we are very happy to be associated with Hopkins."

When the De La Hoya-Hopkins alliance was first announced, cynics wondered out loud how long the relationship would last before the first lawsuit was filed. A far more immediate concern, however, was the legal wrangling between Hopkins and King that was ongoing as this issue went to press. "The Executioner" parted with King immediately following his December 2003 thrashing of William Joppy, but the promoter insists that Hopkins is still contractually bound to him.

"I have no worries whatsoever," claimed De La Hoya. "One thing you have

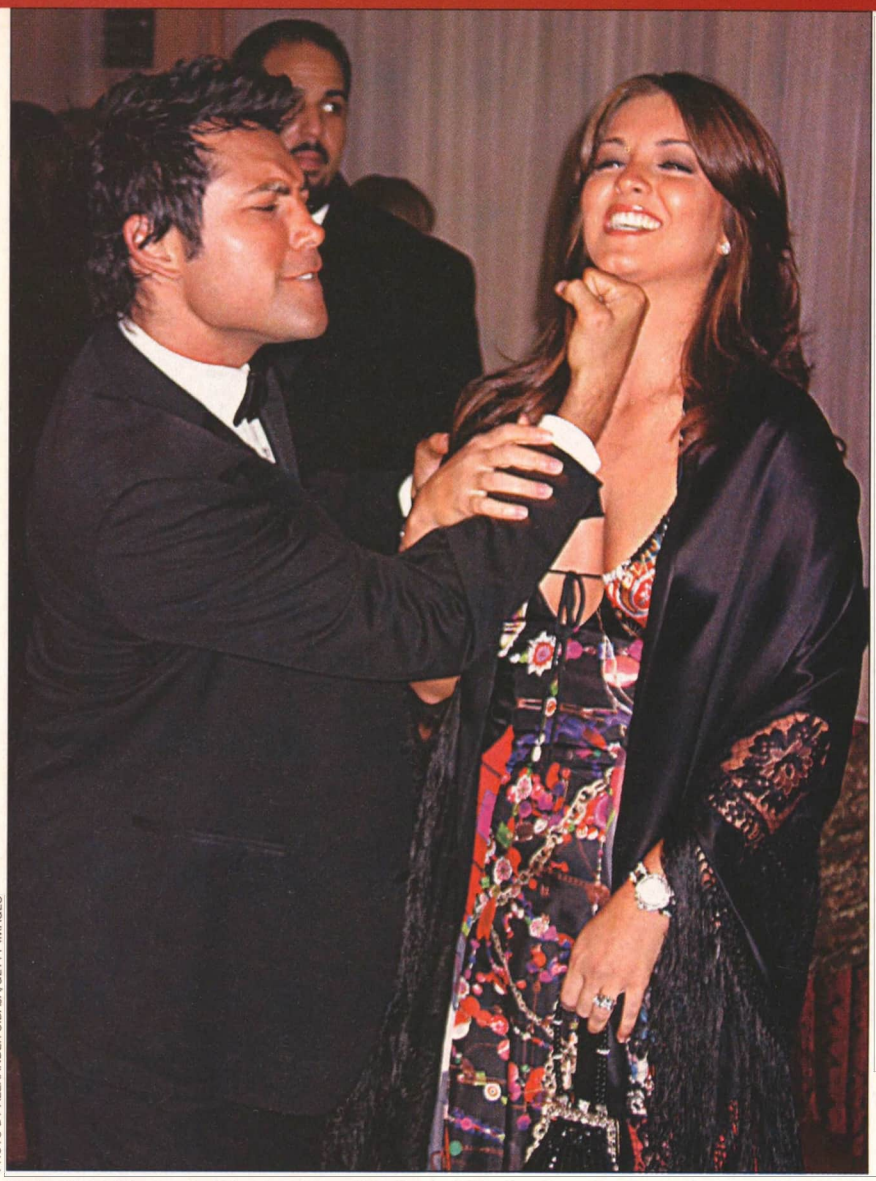


PHOTO BY ALEXANDER SIBAJA/GETTY IMAGES

De La Hoya takes a playful poke at his wife, singer Millie Corretjer, during a fundraiser for the Oscar De La Hoya Foundation. It's easy to understand why Oscar doesn't like leaving Millie when he goes to training camp in the mountains of Big Bear, California.

to keep in mind is that Bernard Hopkins has been a victim of all the negativity that surrounds boxing, and that's something we have to put a halt to—contract disputes, manadatories, this and that. It's got to stop. So now we're putting our foot down and really making a change. It's not going to be overnight, but if it takes five or 10 years out of my time, I'm going to do it. I'm only 31 years old. I want to promote for a long time. I'm not concerned about the deal with Don King and Bernard Hopkins turning into a bad one. On the contrary, we are going to show the world that we can't be bullied around by people who have been dominating the sport. Hopkins' 20th title defense will be promoted by Golden Boy Promotions."

De La Hoya's promotional company got a significant boost in late-November when Marco Antonio Barrera won his rubber match with Erik Morales. Barrera's first outing for Golden Boy Promotions had ended in disaster when Manny Pacquiao handed the Mexican a one-sided beating and took the featherweight title via 11th-round knockout. Another loss, this time to the Arum-promoted Morales, would have been a substantial blow, but Barrera prevailed, turning in his best performance since he ended Naseem Hamed's undefeated streak in 2001.

"It was such a great thrill, highlight for our company," said De La Hoya. "The first fight we had with Barrera, against Pacquiao, was a great fight, a very entertaining fight. Unfortunately, he lost, but the beauty of it is that now we can have a rematch. I think Barrera has proved that he can still be one of the best fighters out there when he's focused, and I think that if he does have a rematch with Pacquiao, it will be a different story."

While Barrera's resurgence and the addition to Hopkins to the roster appear to have put Golden Boy Promotions on solid footing, one can't help but wonder if Oscar is spreading himself too thin, trying to both promote and fight. This concern came to the forefront in January when Richard Schaefer, CEO of Golden Boy Promotions, told the *Los Angeles Daily News* that De La Hoya's tentative plans for 2005 did not include fighting. When questioned about Schaefer's comment, De La Hoya gave a rambling and somewhat nebulous reply.

"At this stage of my career, at 31 years of age, I'm not getting any younger. I should be fighting more often," said De La Hoya. "But I opted to take several months off to recuperate my body and relax my mind. It's more the mind, because going to the mountains for two months and not seeing my family, sometimes it gets to me. Sometimes I think to myself, *why am I still boxing?*

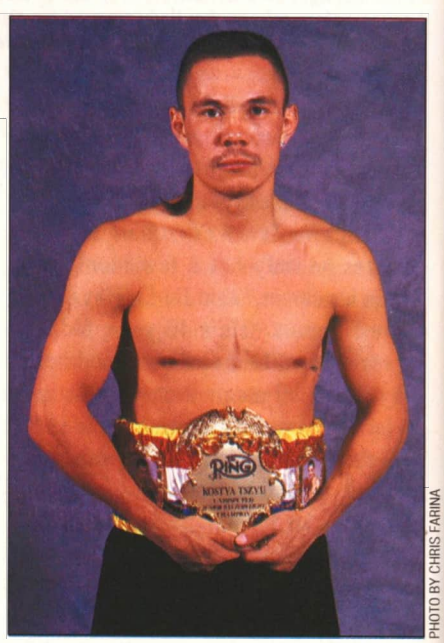


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

De La Hoya's decision to drop back down to the welterweight division makes a superfight with junior welterweight champ Kostya Tszyu a real possibility. They were tentatively scheduled to fight in 1997, but that fell apart when Vince Phillips stopped Tszyu.

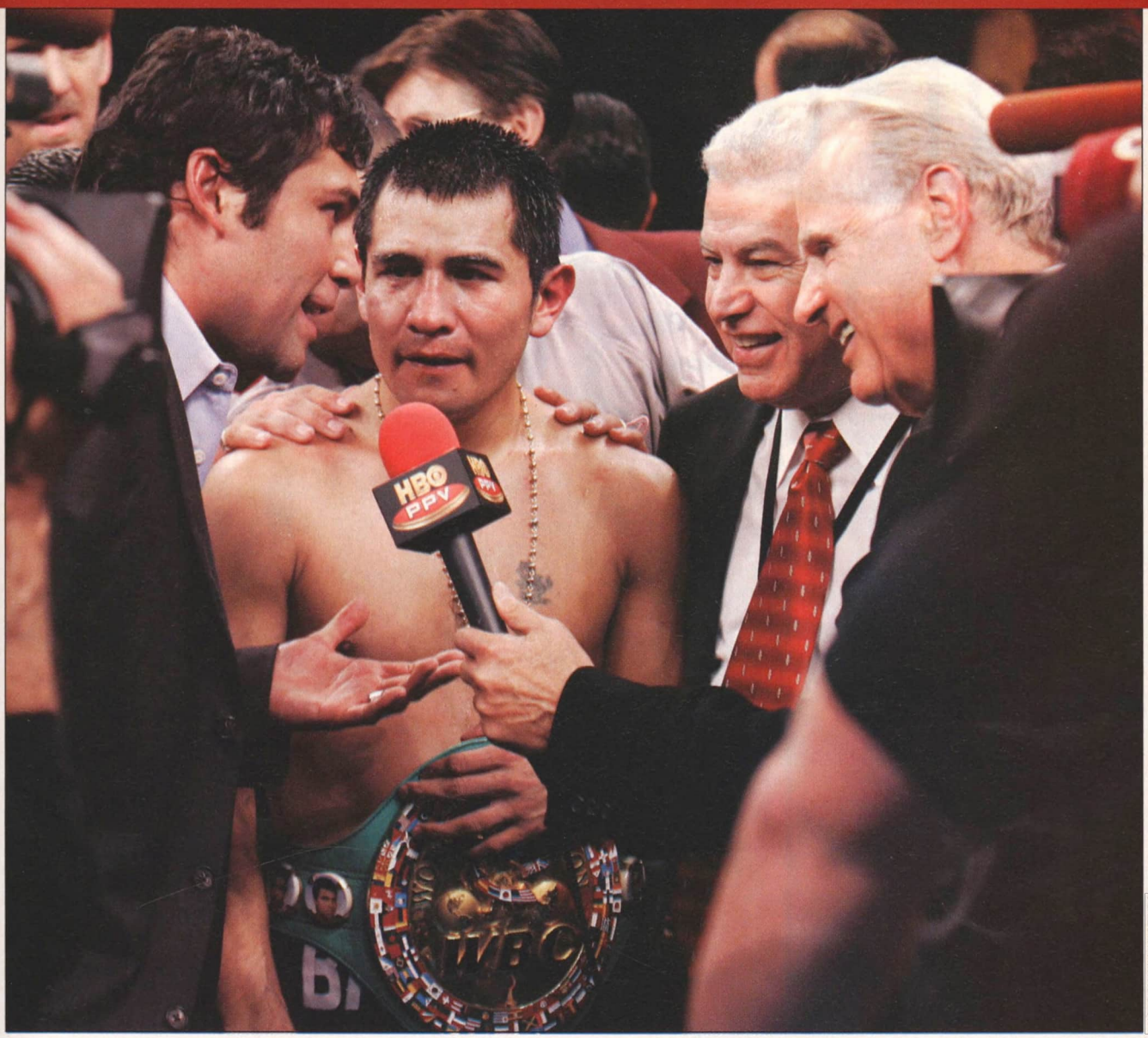


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Oscar's Golden Boy Promotions got a boost in November 2004 when Marco Antonio Barrera, who is one of the biggest stars under promotional contract to Golden Boy, beat arch-rival Erik Morales in THE RING's Fight of the Year.

I've been blessed with everything. I've won world titles and I'm content with myself. I'm satisfied with my career. So I ask myself, *why are you still fighting, why are you still going away for two months?*

"But I love the sport of boxing, and when I do go up to the mountains and stay away from my family, I want to make sure it's done right. But before then, I want to take the necessary time off to work on other things, to work on other businesses I have besides Golden Boy Promotions, focus on that. And when I'm back, it will be 100 percent."

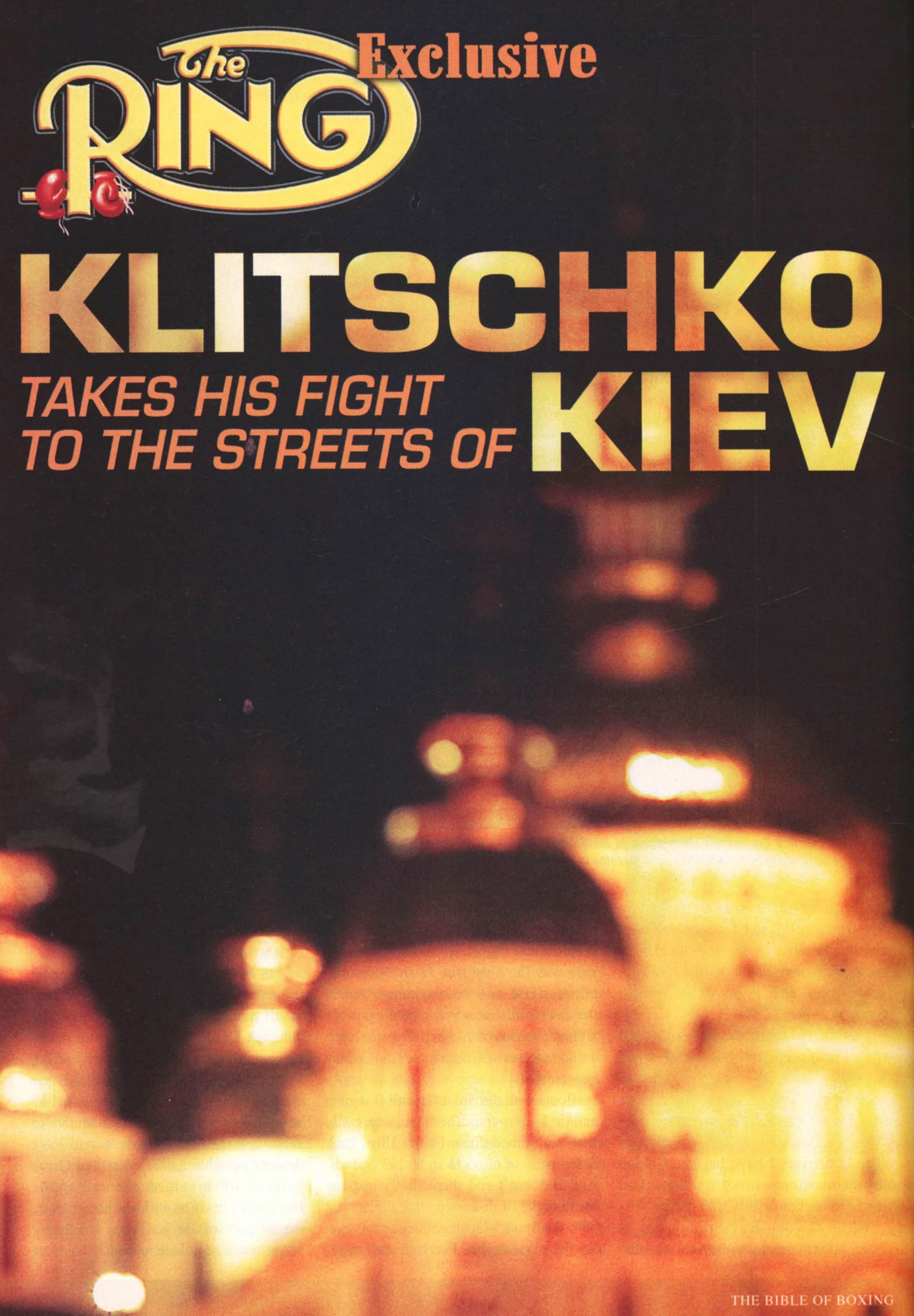
While Golden Boy Promotions is clearly an important player, right now the boxing industry needs De La Hoya in the ring more than it does as front man for a promotional outfit. His bout with Hopkins was the only true financial blockbuster of '04, and the way things look at the dawn of the new year, there's nobody around capable of coming close to duplicating the sort of numbers The Golden Boy creates.

Bouts with the Spinks-Judah II winner and/or Tszyu would be huge, especially with a slimmed-down De La Hoya back at his best, or close to it, at 147 pounds. And it doesn't end there. Let's just say for the sake of discussion that Oscar beat both the Spinks-Judah winner and Tszyu. By then, undefeated Puerto Rican sensation Miguel Cotto would most likely be ready to move up from junior welterweight.

For a while now, De La Hoya's appeal has been more celebrity-based than a result of his recent ring exploits. And although he's rich enough to walk away without a backward glance, there's still a fighter lurking somewhere behind that movie star face. Moreover, at 147 pounds, that fighter just might be able to achieve things few people would have thought possible as they watched Oscar gasping for breath at the end of the Hopkins fight. If he wants it bad enough, the autumn of De La Hoya's fighting career could be golden indeed. ■

The RING Exclusive

KLITSCHKO TAKES HIS FIGHT TO THE STREETS OF KIEV



By Brian Doogan

It was almost midnight, approaching the end of two extraordinary days in Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, when Vitali Klitschko emerged from the back seat of his chauffeur-driven Mercedes and stood before the Mikhaylovsky Cathedral, viewing with unmistakable pride its magnificent frontage against the star-filled night sky.

"Stalin exploded this cathedral," explained Klitschko. During the purges of the 1930s, the former Russian leader ordered that it be razed to the ground. "But every citizen in this country contributed to rebuilding it. That statue between the domes of the Archangel Mikhail, with the sword in its hand, pure gold. My brother, Wladimir, and I paid for that."

Symbolically significant in Ukrainian culture, people believe that Mikhail, who is the patron saint of Kiev, watches over the city, that he is its protector. In May 1999, the restored cathedral was solemnly opened and City of Kiev Day was officially declared.

"We spoke, Wladimir and me, at the re-opening and said that we hope very much that barbarism is over and that Kiev citizens will treat their past, present, and future, their history and their culture with pride and respect," Klitschko related. "This remains our hope today, especially at this time, the most important moment in the history of Ukraine. Just one month ago, over a million people came on the streets of Kiev to make a protest against the liar (Viktor Yanukovych, who had falsely declared himself the winner of the

PHOTO BY DMITRY BELIAKOV

Klitschko poses proudly outside of Mikhaylovsky Cathedral in Kiev, Ukraine, which he and his brother, Wladimir, helped rebuild and restore. The Cathedral, destroyed by Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin in the 1930s, is an important symbol for Klitschko and his fellow Ukrainians.

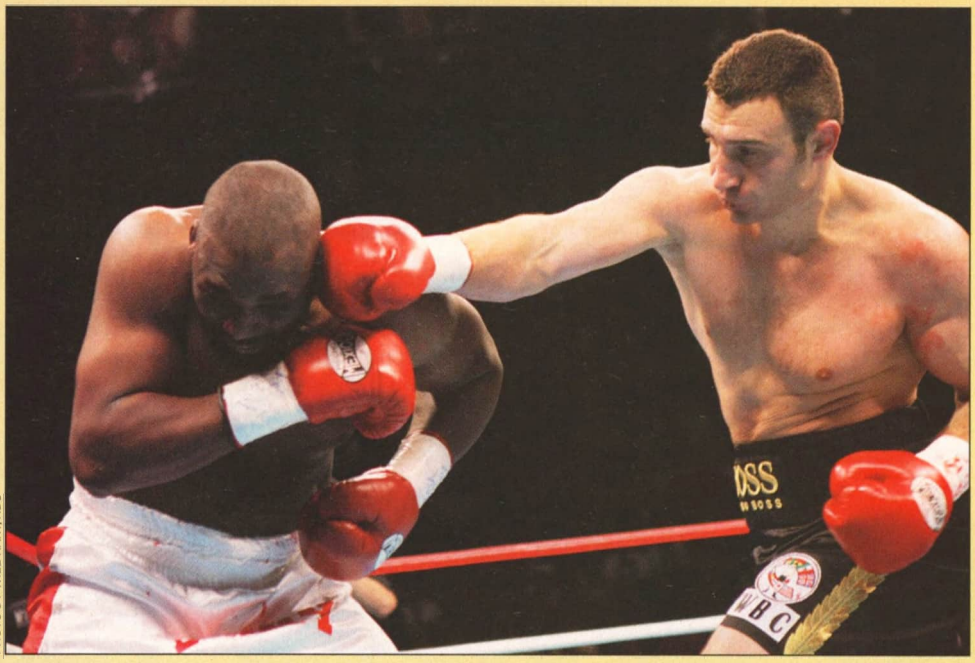


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Klitschko lands a right hand en route to an eighth-round knockout of Danny Williams on December 11, 2004, in Las Vegas. The heavyweight champion had considered pulling out of the fight to join his countrymen protesting in the streets, but was persuaded to stay in the U.S. and fight by Ukrainian President-to-be Viktor Yushchenko.

country's presidential elections) and against the falsification of election results. Nobody paid these people to come onto the streets. It came from their hearts and their souls. It was a peaceful moment. This whole revolution has happened in the right way because we are fighting for freedom, for democracy, for our future and the future of our children."

In this fight, Viktor Yuschenko, the opposition leader of the Orange Revolution, had a powerful and hugely influential ally in the world heavyweight champion. "Our president will be Yuschenko," was Klitschko's cry, all the way up to polling day on December 26. "The day our country took a step that was not just important," Klitschko would say later, "but historic."

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THE RING's incredible journey alongside the most politically active world heavyweight champion since Muhammad Ali began on December 22, four days before Ukraine's presidential election re-run that swept Yuschenko into power. The Klitschko brothers arrived in Kiev late on the night before. A midday press conference was their first public engagement, and they arrived at the Arena International complex immaculately attired in dark suits and flanked by four bodyguards wearing earpieces.

"Welcome to Kiev," Vitali said warmly, extending his shovel-like hand. "This press conference, we don't really have the time—but it is always like this when we are in Kiev, meeting after meeting, little opportunity to relax."

For a man with precious little time, he proved to be generous with it, answering questions in Ukrainian, Russian, German, and English for the assembled international media.

Wladimir sat to his brother's right. They come as a package, running their own company, K2 Promotions, and fronting advertising campaigns for beers, designer wear, and jewelry.

"I think they are unique in the world of sport," explained Natasha Lisova, a Kiev-based reporter assigned to the brothers' homecoming. "Here are two brothers, well-educated (Vitali and Wladimir both have Ph.Ds from the University of Kiev) and successful athletes at the same time. Also, they present a very positive image of their country abroad, involving themselves in charity work in Kiev and Ukraine through their own foundation and internationally through their work with UNESCO (the United Nations organization that aids impoverished children around the world). They are always smiling, always friendly, and people like and respect them. They are straight and open and they come across as good guys."

PHOTO BY SERGEI SUPINSKY/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Vitali (far right) joins his brother, Wladimir, Yushchenko, and Yushchenko ally Yulia Timodshenko, during a mass rally in Kiev's Independence Square on December 22, four days before Yushchenko was elected president of Ukraine.

On Khreshchatik Street, where tens of thousands of Orange Revolutionaries had pitched tents and declared this area "Free Territory," braving sub-zero temperatures to make their stand for democracy, Klitschko's popularity was emphasized. "Yuschenko is our leader," declared Dimitri

PHOTO BY DMITRY BELIAKOV

Klitschko signs autographs for his many fans during his visit to Kiev. He is a tremendous source of pride to the citizens of Ukraine, and his involvement in the country's volatile political situation helped sway the election in favor of progressive candidate Yuschenko.

Kirichenko. "But Vitali Klitschko is our champion." He said that he had walked down this street to Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) to watch several of Klitschko's fights on the big screens. "And he made me proud," he smiled. "Very proud."

It was the sight of these people on the streets—the foot soldiers of this peaceful revolution, who huddled around their old stoves and barrels of burning wood by day and by night wrapped themselves up like Egyptian mummies—that had moved Klitschko so deeply that he considered pulling out of his title defense against Britain's Danny Williams on December 11 in Las Vegas. As he watched on TV the demonstrations taking place (a protest that culminated in the November elections being declared fraudulent by Ukraine's Supreme Court), the people's champion yearned to be with his people. Yuschenko called him at his training camp in Los Angeles and told him to stay, to fight Williams and "do the thing that has brought a lot of pride to the country at a difficult time." For eight rounds he battered Williams until the courageous chal-

PHOTO BY DMITRY BELIAKOV

Klitschko smiles in the face of adversity as he flies aboard a private jet en route to the southern part of Ukraine, the political power-base of incumbent president Viktor Yanukovych. Klitschko was concerned there might be trouble, but even in parts of the country where support for Yanukovych is strong, "Dr. Iron Fist" is still a hero.

lenger was rescued by the referee. An orange scarf hung from the side of his shorts, a potent symbol of the struggle at home, polemic even.

"In the east of Ukraine, the government switched off the TV channel that televised my fight against Williams because I wore the orange scarf. They didn't want my message to reach those people," Klitschko revealed. It is in the east, around the mining city of Donetsk, that Yanukovych has his power base. But Klitschko's popularity could have influenced voters even there. "Nobody in the east was allowed to see this orange scarf, to hear the message. I said before the fight that I was going to do this, that I was fighting for revolution, that my fight was for people fighting for democracy. So they made sure that people in that region were unable to see my fight.

"We talk about democracy, about liberty, about glasnost. But these were the actions of a dictator. I didn't want to say he was a dictator, but the rules he imposed on people, they taste like dictator, they smell like dictator."

Klitschko was now being driven through the streets of Kiev, to a meeting with the parliamentary speaker, Volodimir Litvin, who would disclose to him just how near to a bloody conflict the country had teetered during the revolution's early days.

"In the boxing ring, men fight with honor. In this arena, the fight is dirty. Sometimes there is not much honor shown at all."
—Vitali Klitschko

"They were ready to go in with their guns before Litvin persuaded the chief of police not to do it," Klitschko reported. "It was that close. With blood, this whole revolution would be developed the wrong way. I was shocked to hear just how close it came to blood in these streets. There could have been so much blood, and then where might we be?"

By 6 p.m., the people were pouring into Maidan Nezalezhnosti, some 250,000 of them, and the Klitschko brothers were making their way through the masses and onto a large stage to stand side-by-side with Yuschenko. Directly after Yuschenko addressed the crowd, the champion spoke: "We have the world's attention. The eyes of the world are on us. This is our moment when we are making a great choice, a step for freedom. This is for tomorrow and for the days and years beyond, and the whole world is our witness. Our future, our lives will begin to change on December 26 when the country votes again. This fight of ours is for democracy, for our country to become a true democracy and for our president to be Viktor Yuschenko."

They chanted "Yu-schen-ko," a quarter of a million revolutionaries, as they marched home, and some of them chorused another name, "Klitsch-ko," their champion.

***

As if to share a secret, Klitschko leaned across his seat at the front of the private plane and drew in close. "Stick with me after we land. We must stay together," he warned. "If we stay together, we will be all right." We were en route to Zaporozhie, the main city in an industrial region in the south of Ukraine that is predominantly Leninist red. Klitschko had been asked by Yuschenko, immediately after the rally the night before, to accompany a delegation of his closest political allies to spread the message of the Orange Revolution. This journey out of Kiev was into hostile territory so, although spirits were high, the mood was tense.

"There are dangers, of course," Klitschko acknowledged. "Right now is a very dangerous time. You need only look at the face of Yuschenko to know there is risk."

Yuschenko's face bears the awful scars of his country's fight for freedom. He was poisoned last September, and government and even Kremlin complicity is widely suspected.

"The doctors told Yuschenko he should be dead," Klitschko revealed. "At first, many people doubted it was poisoning, but this was confirmed when he underwent tests in Vienna. The specialists said that the concentration of dioxin in his body was 1,000 times what is normal in a human being. Only he is a strong man, he would not have survived otherwise. Of

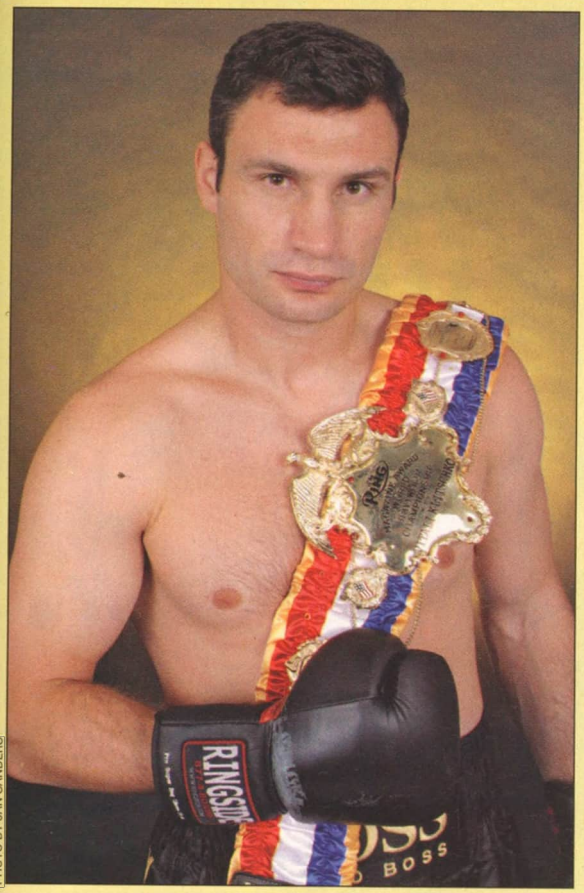

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

Now that the political situation has calmed down in his homeland, Klitschko can spend time with his family and then prepare for his next title defense. Speculation centers on Hasim Rahman as the likely next challenger to try his luck against Klitschko.

course, it has left a lasting effect on his face and his body, but he is feeling stronger day by day, he told me last night, and doctors have said to him not to worry. It is scary that something like this can happen. It shows that with billions of dollars at stake in this political game, life costs not so much."

Yuschenko's absence from the journey south, a decision made at the last minute, was a further sign of how this fight had become dirty. Klitschko made his darkest revelation shortly before the plane touched down at an isolated airfield on the outskirts of Zaporozhie: "Last night I saw many bodyguards looking through binoculars at the buildings opposite the podium. There were fears of a sniper attack. Did you see the orange flags flying in front of the stage? They were actually raised to a certain height to try to obscure the view for any assassin. This isn't nice to speak about, I know, but this is the reality of the situation here. This is why we need change in our country.

"In the boxing ring, men fight with honor. In this arena, the fight is dirty. Sometimes there is not much honor shown at all."

Into this arena, Klitschko stepped. The final touches were made to his speech by Alexei Kucherenko, a former governor in Zaporozhie, who talked him through the key points. On the runway, four cars were parked in line and a small group of Yuschenko supporters waiting by the exit began their chants of "Klitsch-ko, Klitschko" as he emerged out of the back of the plane. When they converged on his car, he climbed out and greeted them, looking every inch of his imposing 6'7" frame the aspiring politician, shaking hands and signing autographs, smiling and joking until, finally, his bodyguards ushered him back inside the car, and the cavalcade sped into the city.

At a press conference in a city center hotel, he was asked if his support for Yuschenko had been bought. "You can't sell your heart and you can't sell your soul," he replied. "No one could pay me for this."

The question of motive was revisited in his speech: "In my fight against Danny Williams on December 11, I wore an orange scarf on my shorts and my victory was dedicated to all of you who have come out this evening, regardless of the cold weather, to express your feelings. I am not a politician. I am an athlete, but I don't know of anyone in the world who hasn't been touched by these events in Ukraine and the deep desire for change shown by our people. The challenge we face affects everyone in Ukrainian society and it makes me proud that the people are so active and that I am able to play my part."

His delivery was measured and authoritative, and no other speaker was so enthusiastically received.

"If Vitali were to have given his support to Yanukovych instead," Kucherenko speculated on the flight back to Kiev, "it could well be decisive the other way in this election. For many people in Ukraine, his voice is very influential."

The atmosphere was more relaxed by then. The stewardess was distributing sandwiches and beverages when Klitschko raised an orange in his hand. "You know, the wife of Yanukovych said in a speech that they've put some chemicals into the oranges in Kiev and these have turned the people mad—and she was being serious," he said, raising his voice for emphasis. "She said that the people are going high on oranges! Can you believe this? Can you believe there are people who believe this?"

But what if enough people believed this? What if Yanukovych prevailed?

"If Yanukovych wins ... " Klitschko hesitated and gazed out of his window at the snow-covered landmass below. "I'm afraid ... I am afraid."

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Fear had yielded to the thrill of Yuschenko's victory and renewed hope about the future for Ukraine in the early days of the new year. Klitschko flew to Hawaii for a family holiday.

"Now my time is for them, for my wife, Natalia, my five-year-old son, Yegor, and my two-year-old daughter, Elizabeth," Klitschko said happily. "And my heart is joyful because I know my country can begin to build for a better future. Before, there were rules that worked only for a very small group of people. The vast majority, maybe 90 percent, waited for something to improve their lives, and nothing changed. Other countries have developed, like Poland for example. Why not ours? The potential is there to make Ukraine great. Now the people can make this happen."

Yuschenko, before his election win, had pointed to Klitschko as a symbol of what can be achieved: "Vitali is our champion, a symbol for the nation, and at this time especially, it is very important to have champions, to have strong people whom others can look up to. In a champion boxer like Vitali Klitschko, we have this symbol."

Like the Archangel Mikhail, a reassuring symbol of strength. ■

Brian Doogan is THE RING's European correspondent.

Jimmy Braddock Wasn't The Only Cinderella Man

SOMETIMES THE JOURNEY HAS A PAYOFF

By Don Stradley

When sportswriters ask a journeyman fighter why he continues fighting, the answer can be as predictable as a beauty pageant winner's wish for world peace. The journeyman will say, "Boxing is all I know," or, "I'm a few fights away from a title shot."

We'll nod our heads solemnly, admiring his bravery in the face of what seems like a fruitless campaign. Maybe we'll recall Jim Braddock, the Depression-era mug who had 22 losses on his record when he defeated Max Baer for the heavyweight championship and a place in boxing folklore. If a blown-up light heavyweight with brittle hands could do it, all journeymen can remain hopeful. Meanwhile, with visions of Brad-

Glen Johnson celebrates his upset victory over Antonio Tarver (opposite page) to win the light heavyweight championship. Johnson is the latest of a series of long-suffering journeymen who finally reached the top. The standard bearer for journeymen-turned-champions is Jimmy Braddock, pictured wearing a cardboard crown the morning after he upset Max Baer to win the heavyweight title (left).

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Johnson sinks a left hook into Tarver's ribs en route to the 175-pound title. Losing so many controversial decisions over the years prompted Johnson to switch to a more aggressive style of fighting that has worked out very well for him.

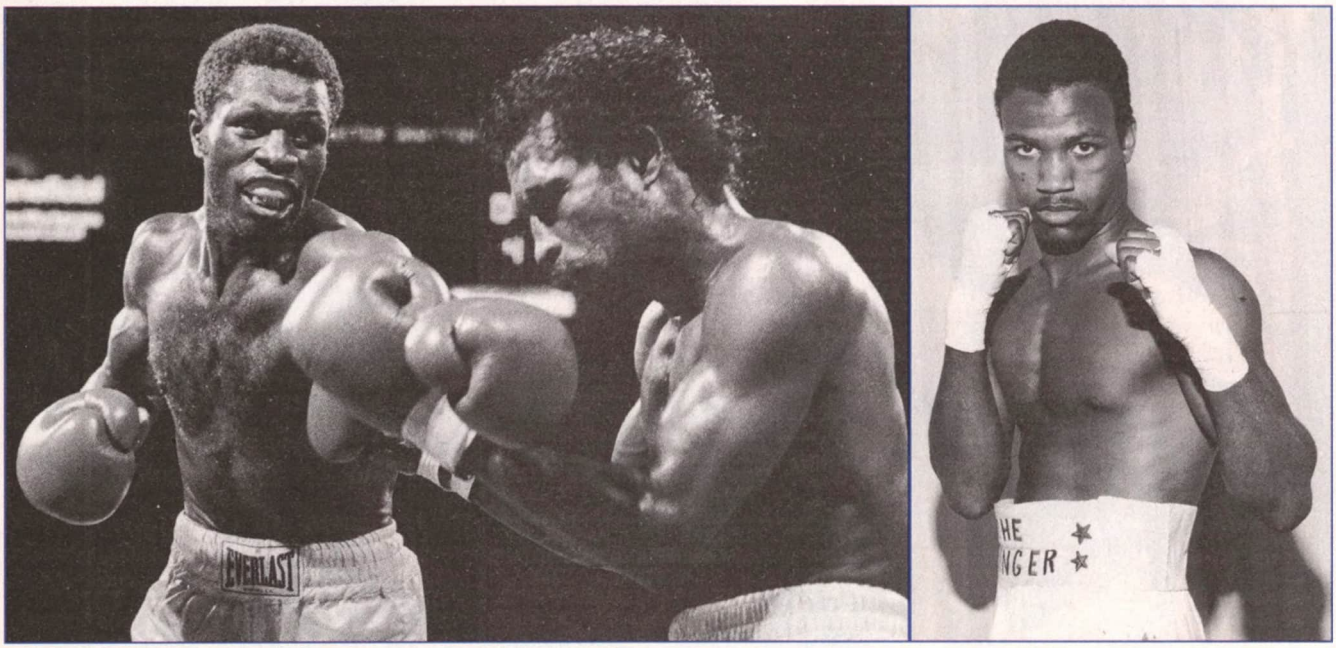
dock dancing in their heads, journeymen continue taking fights on short notice, losing close decisions in the other guy's hometown, and struggling to stay fit while working menial jobs in between fights.

If today's journeymen don't want to reach back to Braddock for inspiration, they can look to Glen Johnson, a fighter who up until recently was considering a career in restoring old houses. After a year that saw him defeat Roy Jones and Antonio Tarver, Johnson will tell you there's nothing wrong with being a journeyman. It all depends on what you learn during your journey. Johnson, THE RING's light heavyweight champion and Fighter of the Year, certainly learned a lot.

"No more fights in other countries," Johnson told THE RING. "Three times as many people put their hands in the pot when you fight in another country. But even if they stole from me, I used the opportunity to learn. That was my education.

"I also learned from my losses, which were robberies. Those losses taught me to change my strategy in the ring. At first I was a boxer, believing in the art of hitting-and-not-getting-hit. But time and time again, I was not rewarded. Now I try to knock people out and be a more aggressive fighter."

In between Braddock's big night in Long Island City and Johnson's banner year, plenty of journeymen have



Among the journeymen who won titles thanks to the proliferation of belts caused by the alphabet organizations were Buster Drayton, pictured tagging Carlos Santos with a left en route to winning the IBF junior middleweight crown in 1986 (above left), and Kelvin Seabrooks (above right), who held the IBF bantamweight belt from May 1987 to July '88, making three successful defenses.

punched their way into the limelight. In 1994, Steve Little took his record of 21-13-2 (5) into the ring to defeat Michael Nunn for the WBA super middleweight title. More recently, in 2003, Javier Jauregui stopped Leavander Johnson in 11 rounds for the vacant IBF lightweight title, proving once again that a fighter with double digits in his loss column can be far more dangerous than a guy with a pristine record.

Journeymen have always been part of the boxing landscape. When Hollywood makes a boxing movie, it's usually about a lovable journeyman. Even Braddock is scheduled for the big screen treatment this year, as director Ron Howard hopes to turn the story into a feel-good blockbuster, a la *Seabiscuit*. But while movie audiences identify with losers who defy the odds, the relationship between journeymen and real boxing fans is more complicated. Other than Braddock, journeymen rarely become heroic figures. When a fighter with a spotty record earns a title shot, we usually say, "How did this bum get there?" If he happens to win the title, we'll wish him the best, but when he inevitably loses the title, we'll say, "He didn't deserve it, anyway. He just got lucky." Face it; if we really loved journeymen, we'd fill up the MGM Grand to see Emanuel Augustus.

Our prickly attitudes may come from how dumb we feel when a journeyman wins. When a Glen Johnson beats a Roy Jones, it makes us feel less like experts. And while a down-on-his-luck fighter winning the title made headlines during Braddock's gritty time, it doesn't have the same cachet in this era. We don't talk about good old American pluck; we're more likely to talk about Andy Warhol's 15 minutes of fame, or the sorry state of boxing.

We also talk about the availability of title belts. The creation of the IBF in 1984 gave a number of journeymen the chance to win titles, including Buster Drayton, Kelvin Seabrooks, and Freddie Pendleton. Pendleton's loopy career was especially fascinating. While poor management hampered Seabrooks and Drayton, they were both talented fighters with solid amateur backgrounds.

Pendleton began his career before he really knew how to box. With only six amateur fights to his credit, five of which were losses, Pendleton's style consisted of bouncing around the ring without throwing punches. This didn't impress many judges, and his pro record soon stood at 7-7-1 (3). But through trial and error, Pendleton developed a style and started beating quality opponents such as Roger Mayweather and Livingstone Bramble. Still, no matter how Pendleton improved, the networks wouldn't touch him because of his ugly record. Instead, he became a favorite of cable-TV, where hardcore fans saw "Fearless Freddie" bash his way up the rankings regardless of his journeyman status.

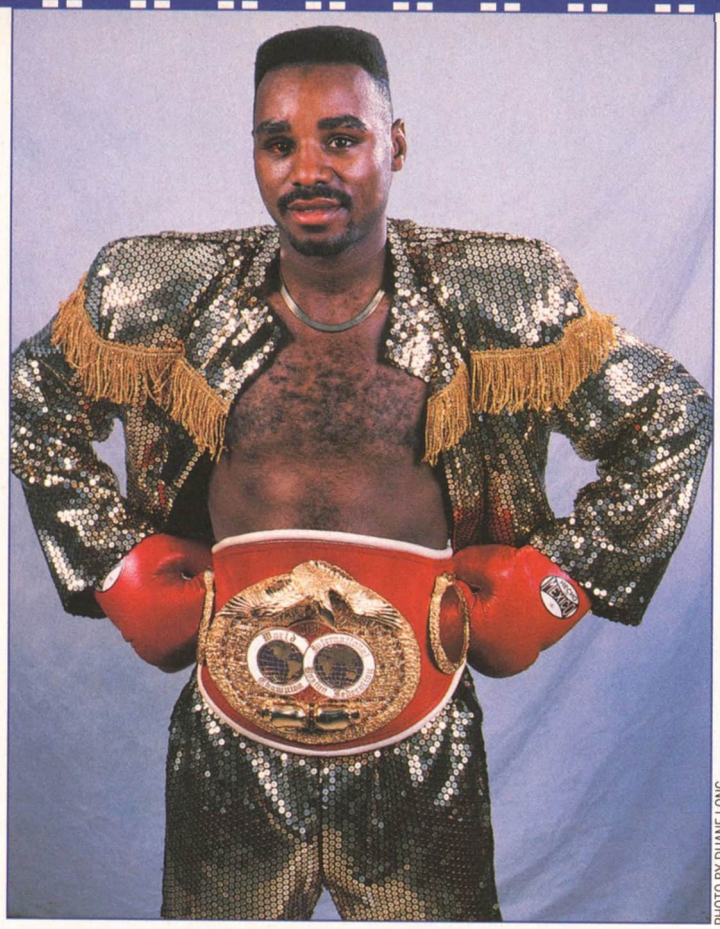


PHOTO BY DUANE LONG

Freddie Pendleton had lost 17 pro fights prior to winning the IBF lightweight title in 1993. "Fearless Freddie's" poor start had a lot to do with a brief amateur career and then being overmatched in the early part of his pro career.

Pendleton eventually earned a shot at lightweight champ Pernell Whitaker, but in 1990 Whitaker was nearly unbeatable, and Pendleton, although he gave a solid account of himself, lost by decision. Undaunted, Pendleton racked up eight straight wins after losing to Whitaker, and when "Sweet Pea" gave up the IBF belt, Pendleton faced Tracy Spann to fill the vacancy. The fight was ruled a technical draw, forcing a rematch five months later in Atlantic City. This time Pendleton won a 12-round decision and the accompanying hardware. His 32-17-4 (22) record was still far from impressive, but he'd lived his dream.

A new champ with 17 losses sounds unlikely, but Virgil Akins had the same number on his ledger when he won the welterweight title in 1958. Carmen Basilio had given up his belt in '57 to fight middleweight champ Ray Robinson, so a tournament was held to name a new 147-pound boss. The tourney final saw Akins stop Vince Martinez in four rounds, dropping him nine times in the process.

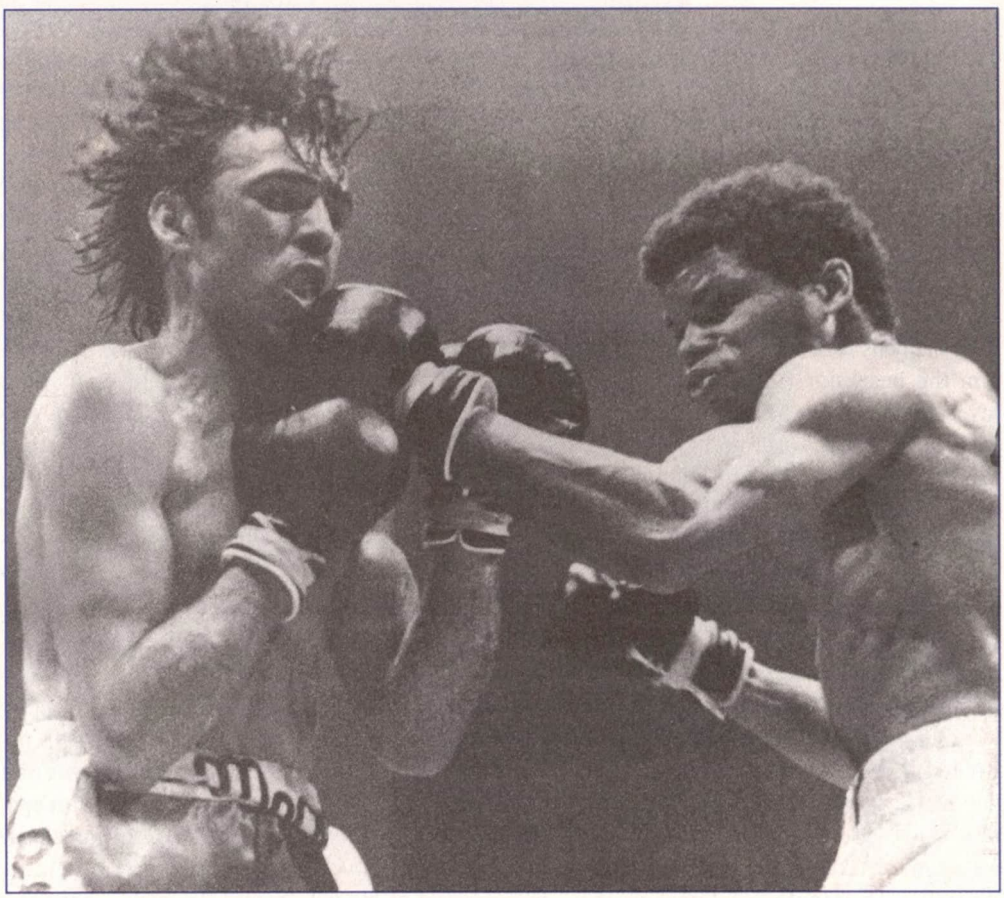
Akins was a typical journeyman. Among his losses were scattered wins over some good fighters, including Hall of Famer Joe Brown and future lightweight champ Wallace "Bud" Smith. But by 1955, Akins had been fleeced by a series of managers and was battling a drinking problem. He may have never made it out of the St. Louis fight clubs if not for two boxing enthusiasts looking for a prospect, Eddie Yawitz, a local druggist, and Bernard Glickman, a Chicago businessman. With two new managers in his corner, Akins stopped hitting the bottle and started hitting opponents. Like Glen Johnson, Akins changed his style. Previous managers had advised him to be cautious, but

Virgil Akins weighs in for his match with Vince Martinez in 1958. When reigning welter champion Carmen Basilio moved up to middleweight, a tournament was held to find his successor, and journeyman Akins won it by knocking out Martinez.

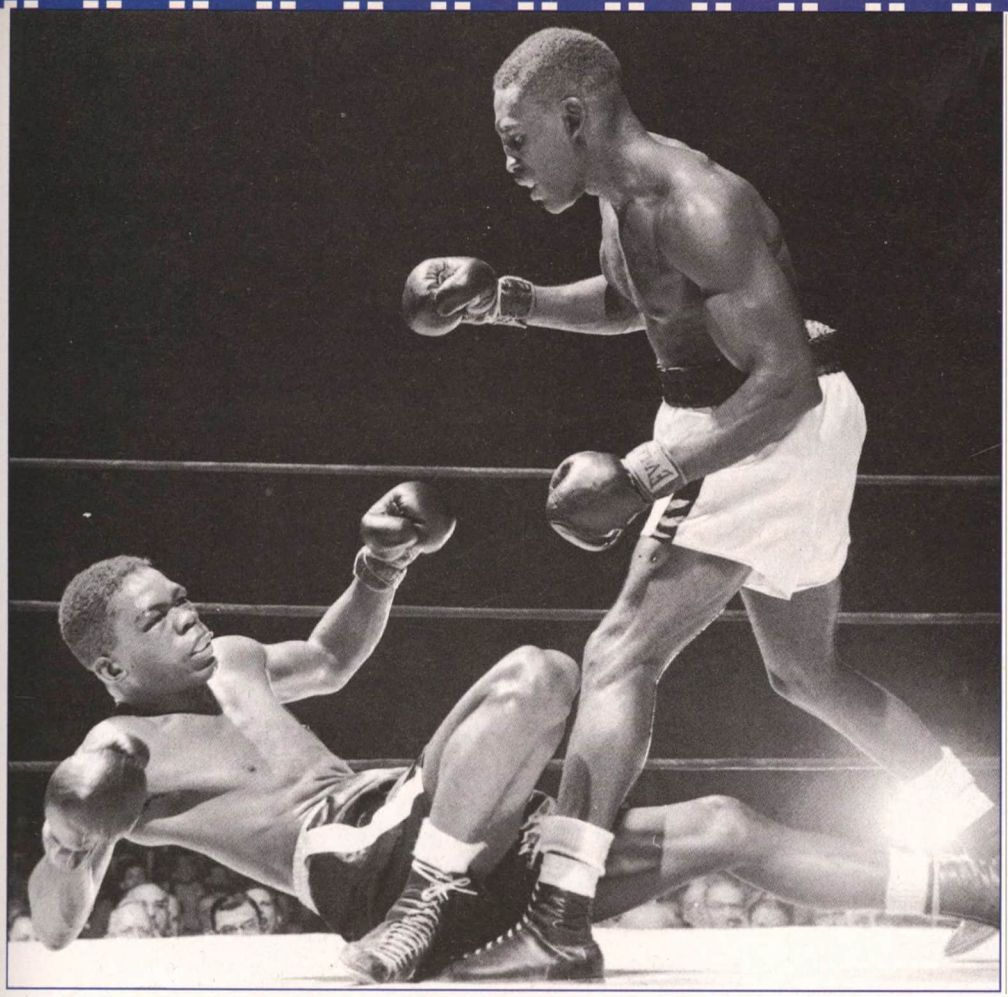
Yawitz encouraged him to start slugging. Akins went on to win 23 of his next 28 fights, culminating with the victory over Martinez.

As inspirational as Akins' story may have been, he remained champ for only six months before losing the title to Don Jordan. The flipside of all Cinderella stories is that journeymen don't remain champions for long. Drayton, Little, Jauregui, and Pendleton all lost their titles within one or two defenses. The ultimate Cinderella man, Braddock, made his first defense against Joe Louis and was massacred, inspiring Bert Randolph Sugar to write, "If his victory over Baer was Braddock's glass slipper, it was closer to midnight than anyone imagined."

Maybe journeymen just aren't meant to be champions. They're usually older fighters, unaccustomed to celebrity or the sudden demands of being champion. Still, a few jour-



Globetrotter Saoul Mamby jolts France's Jean-Baptiste Piedvache with a left en route to a 1978 decision victory in Paris. Two years later, with 12 losses on his record, Mamby won the WBC 140-pound title, and unlike most journeymen who win titles, he managed to make several successful defenses.



Jimmy Carter went from journeyman to Hall of Famer, thanks in large part to his 14th-round knockout of the outstanding Ike Williams at Madison Square Garden in 1951 to win the lightweight title (pictured). Despite a record that shows 30 losses, Carter was inducted in Canastota in 2000.

neymen have had respectable title reigns. Saoul Mamby, a former Bronx cab driver and Vietnam veteran, was 26-12-5 (12) when he won the WBC 140-pound title in 1980. Like Glen Johnson, Mamby learned a lot during his early years, losing close decisions to some of the best of his era, including Roberto Duran and Antonio Cervantes. Also like Johnson, Mamby fought on the road, making appearances in Nigeria, Indonesia, Thailand, and 15 other countries. By the time Mamby won the title by defeating Sang-Hyun Kim in Seoul, Korea, he was an accomplished pro.

Mamby made five successful defenses, including a 13th-round knockout of Esteban DeJesus, but his reign was thankless. Television networks refused to air his fights because his style wasn't exciting. Mamby also battled constantly with his promoter, Don King. Mamby eventually lost his title to Leroy Haley, a fighter managed by King's son, Carl. Broke and beltless, Mamby resumed his journeyman's travels, losing more than he won, until his final fight at age 52.

Jimmy Carter had lost 12 times when he faced the legendary Ike Williams for the lightweight championship in 1951. Williams was nursing an injured arm, but nobody could have predicted that Carter would knock Williams down four times en route to a 14th-round stoppage. Carter's reign was a stormy one. He would lose and regain the lightweight title two times over the next four years, engaging in multifight rivalries with Lauro Salas and Paddy DeMarco. Carter's was the sort of reign where a journeyman thrived, and he relished coming back from losses and whipping the men who'd beaten him, becoming the first fighter in history to win the same title three times. Fittingly, Carter lost the title for good to another journeyman, Bud Smith, in 1955.

Will Glen Johnson be like most journeymen and reign for a short time, or will he hang tough like Mamby and Carter?

"I improve every time I step into the ring," said the 35-year-old Johnson. "I am aging like Bernard Hopkins. He's 40 and at the top of his game. If my body says otherwise I'll pull out, but I don't think the end is near. I fought for short money for a long time, so now it's time to be greedy. I want to capitalize on every dollar and every penny."

There is reason to believe Johnson will keep his title for a while. He didn't win it by beating some inexperienced contender in an elimination tournament, and he didn't catch an undertrained champ with a lucky punch. In beating Tarver, Johnson beat a skilled fighter near his peak. That puts Johnson in a different category than most title-winning journeymen.

Johnson's years of struggle have also given him a quiet wisdom. While a fighter with no losses is like a teenaged boy who has never had his heart broken, Johnson's 42-9-2 (28) record is the picture of heartbreak. That's why his view from the top is so enjoyable. He'll also enjoy the million bucks he pocketed fighting Tarver. A rematch is likely for 2005.

"I'll fight Antonio Tarver as many times as the public wants," said Johnson. "If anyone else wants to try me, tell them to give me a call when they think they're ready."

Johnson's optimism is good news for other journeymen. Their fights may not always be televised, and the press may not sing their praises, but now they can do their own singing, especially if Johnson is around to provide a hallelujah chorus. ■

Don Stradley is a freelance writer from Rockport, Massachusetts, and a regular contributor to this magazine.

OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALIST ANDRE WARD

He Might Be Boxing's Best Damn Prospect Period

By Don Stewart

His pulse still racing after a workout, Virgil Hunter took a seat on the ring apron at the U.S. Karate and Boxing Club in Hayward, California. Through his sweat, Hunter saw a nine-year-old boy standing alone, beating on a heavybag.

"I remember saying to myself, 'This little kid here, he can punch,'" Hunter recalled. "By the time I saw that, he turned around and looked right at me. I nodded my head in approval. He turned around and hit it again. I nodded my head again in approval."

A week passed before Hunter saw Andre Ward again. This time, the boy was with his father, Frank Ward, and older brother Jonathan. Frank, an amateur boxer in his high school years, approached Hunter and asked him if he knew of any good trainers for his sons. He wanted someone who would teach them the art of the game, Hunter said, so that they wouldn't "end up getting whacked upside the head because they didn't know how to box."

Hunter knew a good one: himself. But his standards were high. Frustrated after investing so many months training talented teens fresh out of juvenile hall, only to lose them to the streets, Hunter vowed not to train anyone unless they were mature enough to mold. There'd be no talking back, no dogging it, no excuses. He had his doubts about starting with a kid as young as Andre.

But Frank persisted, and thank goodness for Hunter and Andre that he did. Hunter liked what he saw during a two-week trial period with the boys, and in the 11 years that have passed since, the trainer and the fighter have been everything to each other.

Frank Ward must have sensed something that afternoon in the gym when he decided to talk to Hunter. Andre said his father liked him as a man as much as he did as a trainer. In choosing Hunter, he not only set Andre on a course for Olympic gold in 2004, but he found a man who would turn out to be so much more than just a trainer.

"Really, it's hard to explain it," said Hunter, 51. "It goes much deeper than training a fighter. Andre's like a son to me, and I'm quite sure I'm like a dad to him. Life confirmed it even more. It's much deeper than that. It's father-son, trainer-pupil, confidant-emotional pillar."

While Ward battled through a swollen right eye to pull out a 20-13 decision against Belarus' Magomed Aripgadjiev in the gold medal bout last August 29 in Athens, Greece, Hunter watched from the front row. Not unlike that afternoon in Hayward 11 years before, he sat there encouraging Andre, nodding his head in approval. Andre was also comforted by the presence of Frank in the arena, though Andre had to imagine hearing his father's voice.

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Andre Ward hates losing. It hasn't happened in the ring in seven years, an amazing feat considering the wackiness that often ensues with amateur judging and the sport's computerized scoring system.

Ward and Hunter aren't quite sure exactly how many consecutive fights Ward has won, but that last loss still eats at both of them, especially the

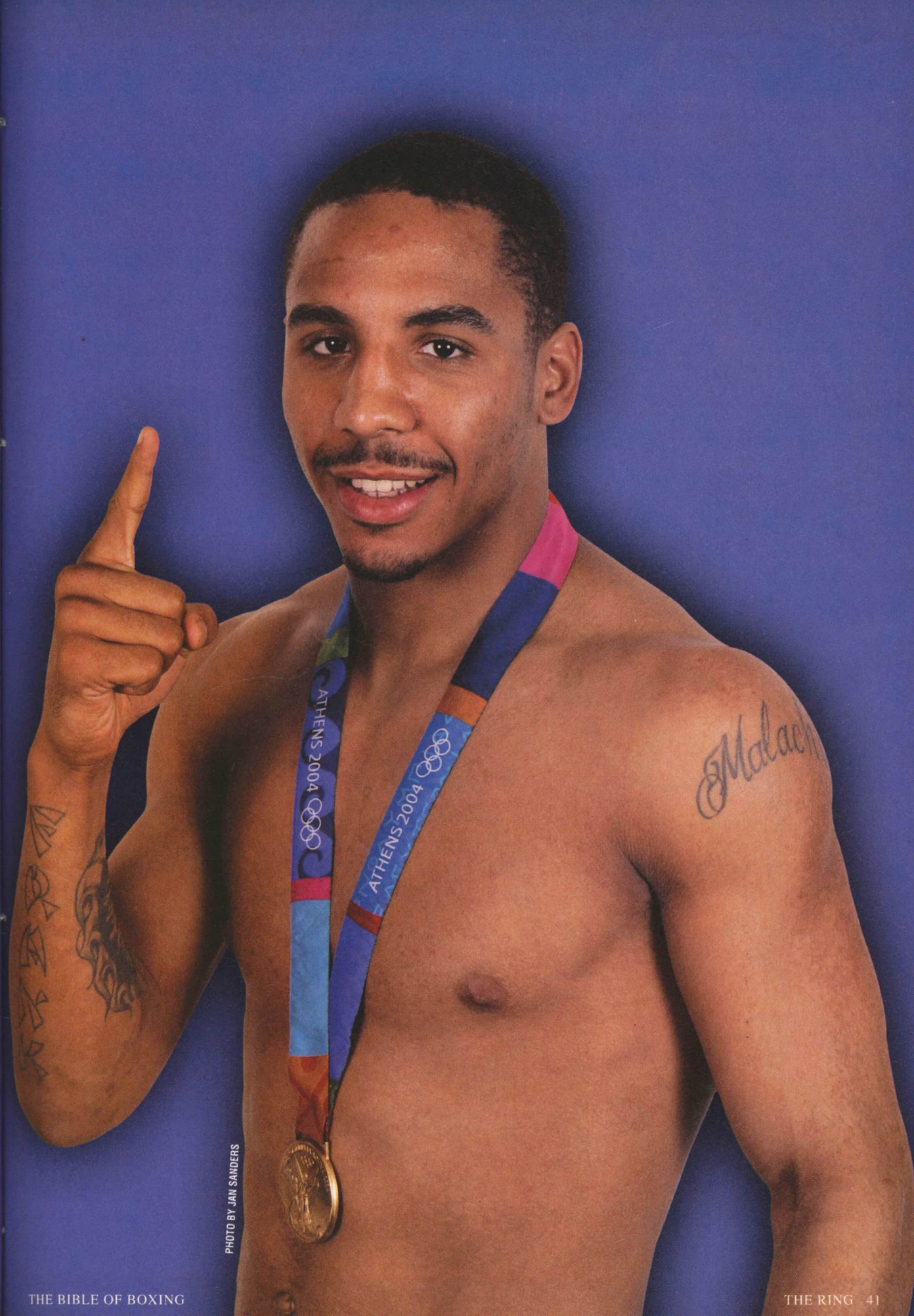


PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

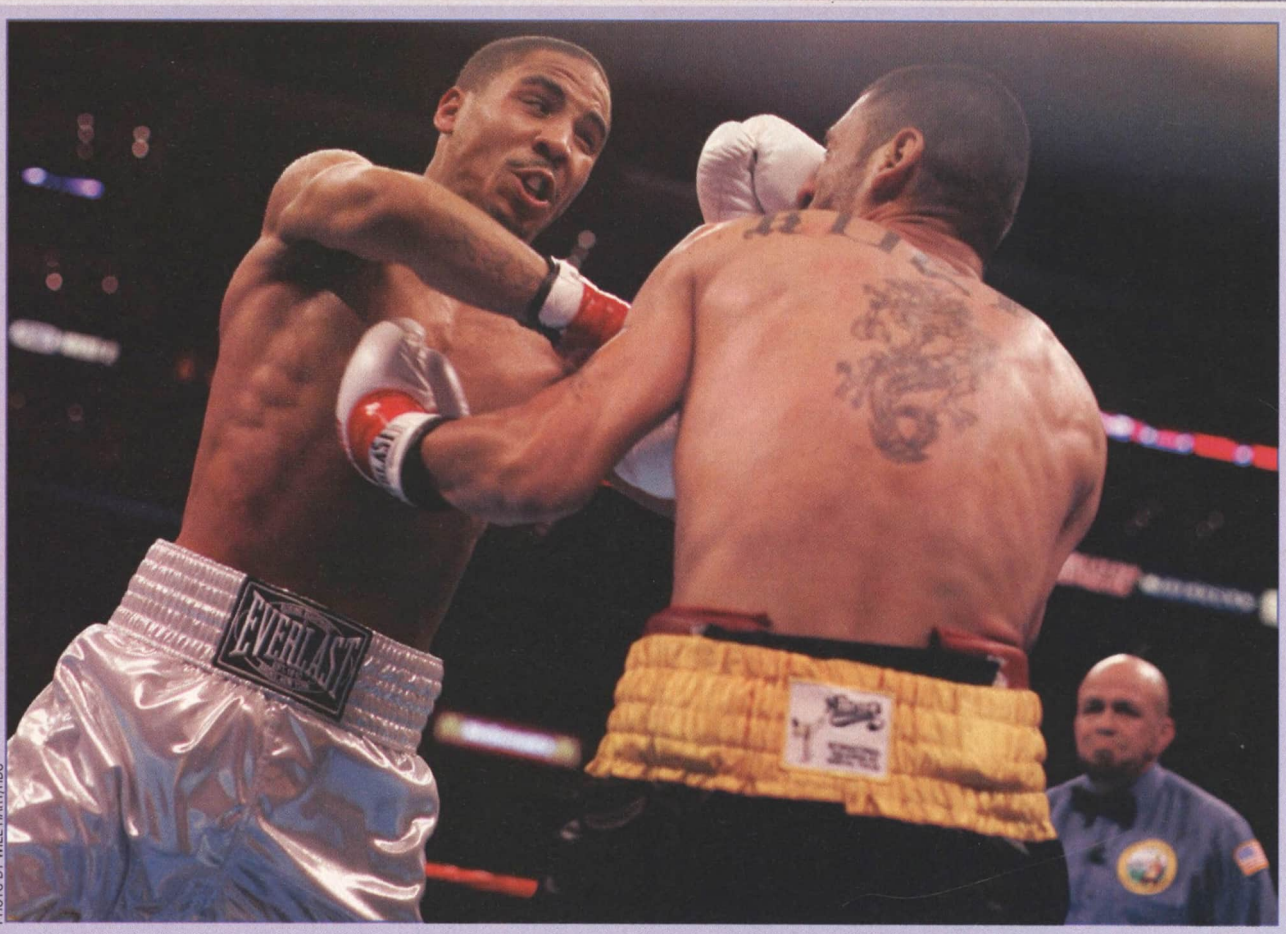


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Ward catches Chris Molina in the nose with a left hand during the Olympic gold medalist's pro debut this past December at Los Angeles' Staples Center. Molina was an awkward opponent, but couldn't come close to keeping pace with Ward in terms of talent.

fighter. It's kind of funny, actually. With the light heavyweight gold medal and HBO exposure in his first pro bout, Ward could be calling out anyone in the world from 160 to 175 pounds: Bernard Hopkins, Jermain Taylor, Jeff Lacy, Glen Johnson, Antonio Tarver. Instead, he's gunning for Jesus Gonzales.

Back when Ward was 13, he dropped a one-point decision to Gonzales in the finals of the Blue and Gold Tournament at Baldwin Park, California. Ward, now 20, lost two points for ducking when Gonzales, according to Hunter, was actually pushing on the back of his head.

"We don't think we lost that fight," Ward said. "That's how they saw it. It was a point or two we lost by. Jesus, he's a good dude. But I'm a competitor and I love what I do. I would love to avenge that someday."

Gonzales, a 20-year-old middleweight, is now 13-0 (10) since turning pro in July of 2003. Ward's co-promoters, Dan Goossen and Roy Jones, came up with heavily tattooed, 2-0 (1) ex-con Chris Molina for Ward's pro debut on December 18 (Ward tattooed him in two rounds). Next up was Minnesota's Kenny Kost, 8-0 (5), whom Ward was scheduled to meet on February 10 on Fox Sports Net's *The Best Damn Sports Show Period*. So the unbeaten Gonzales would seem to fit the pattern.

PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Referee Jose Cobian has a tough time separating Ward and Molina after the opening instructions, as Molina tries to intimidate his 20-year-old foe. Mature beyond his years, Ward wasn't thrown off in the least by Molina's tactics.

PHOTO BY JAN SANDERS

It was all over for the previously unbeaten Molina just 40 seconds into the second round. Ward had scored a knockdown late in round one, and then another one that ended the fight after less than four minutes of action.

"Somewhere along the line, we'd like to set the record straight," Hunter said. "We think that'd be good for boxing. We'd like to set the record straight that if they hadn't taken the two points from him, he wouldn't have lost the fight. It never happened again. He hates to lose. That's not in his vocabulary at all."

Well, it is, but only if Ward puts the word "don't" in front of it. "I don't believe I will lose another fight," he said.

Though losing isn't something he's experienced much within the ropes, he's endured the toughest of losses outside the ring. When Frank Ward died suddenly of a heart attack in 2002, Andre was devastated. For a while, he saw no point in picking up the gloves or praying.

"I was in a depression," said Andre, who tattooed his father's name onto his forearms. "My father's here one day, then he's gone. That didn't make much sense. But God breaks you to make you."

Ward began a rediscovery of his faith and religion on his own terms rather than from someone else's mouth. The result was a naked spirituality that is exposed in most of Ward's conversations. Though it's a daily walk he's still taking, he said, it's evident in how often he mentions his faith that religion helped pull him back up.

He also had a strong supporting cast to keep him standing. There's his mother, Madeline Arvie. There's Tiffiney, his wife since July of '03 and the mother of his two children. And, of course, there's Hunter, whom Ward and his family lived with until after he earned his pro signing bonus.

"He's an upstanding young man," said *San Francisco Chronicle* sportswriter John Crumpacker, who covered Ward during his amateur days. "He's had a small but steady and consistent support group around him, and a good base with King's Gym in Oakland. And he's done something I haven't done: He's married with two kids. His religion at first can be a little off-putting because he talks about it so often, but he really is sincere. He's not like other athletes who just give it lip service. It's who he is."

The word "maturity" actually comes up as often as the words "gold medal" when Ward is the topic of conversation.

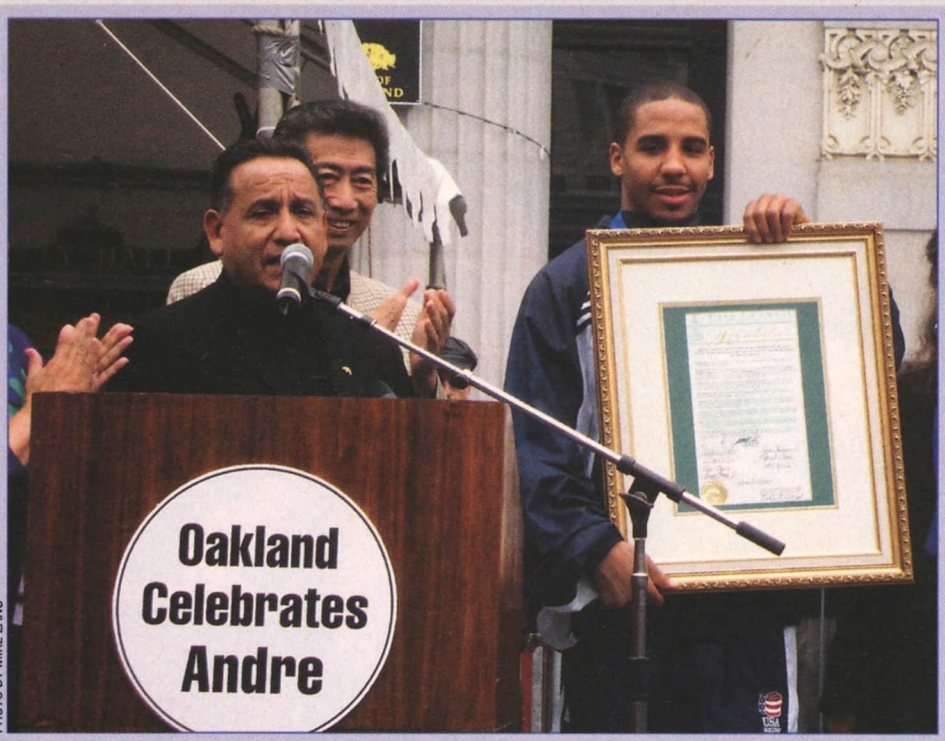


PHOTO BY MIKE LANO

After winning the gold medal in Athens, Ward's hometown of Oakland threw him a celebration. Ward, the star fighter at King's Gym, is the biggest thing to happen to Oakland boxing in quite a while.

Though only 20, Ward easily sounds 30 when you hear his voice. His approach to the sport and to life mirror that aura. It's always been that way for Ward, ever since he used to cling to his father as a boy.

"I like hanging around older guys," Ward said. "They've got a lot of wisdom. I've had an old spirit about me since I came out of my mother's womb. I didn't take an interest in things other kids took an interest in. I was very unique as a young kid. I don't know why I'm like that. But it is what it is, and I take it in stride. That's just me."

When he was in his final preparations for the U.S. Olympic Trials last February, Ward sent his family away to Seattle to stay with Tiffiney's parents so he could maintain his focus. At Athens, he was the only member of the U.S. team to sit with assistant coach Al Mitchell every night watching tapes and devising strategies.

Despite being the first American to win boxing gold since David Reid in 1996, Ward's pro signing bonus was an estimated $400,000, well short of the seven figures earned by members of the 2000 Olympic class. But Ward quickly came to accept that he can't control the boxing market, that the money was more than a lot of fighters ever see, that he'll earn what he deserves in good time.

"He's got everything going for him," Mitchell said. "He's mature, he's settled down, he's spiritual. The only person who can hurt Andre Ward is Andre Ward himself. And I don't think that will happen. He's a very mature young man. He's 30 years old, but he's 20 years old."

Goossen believes Ward's mature, humble, and hard-working image outside the ring could boost his crossover appeal in terms of endorsements and marketability. Basically, he's the type of guy who can land on a Wheaties box.

Goossen likens Ward to basketball superstar LeBron James, who entered the NBA a year ago as an 18-year-old kid with more hype than Y2K and enough Nike endorsement cash to buy Larry Bird.

"I can see those similarities with Andre," Goossen said. "Even though he didn't get the multimillions, his maturity level and the way he's praised his teammates and coaches have showed he's handled the maturity stages like LeBron has.

"Those are all attractive assets, in addition to his ability. There's nothing better than going out and being part of a fighter who has tremendous talent inside the ring and exudes appeal outside with his family, his two young kids. Those are going to be selling points. I think it's going to be the attractiveness of Andre Ward to the general public."

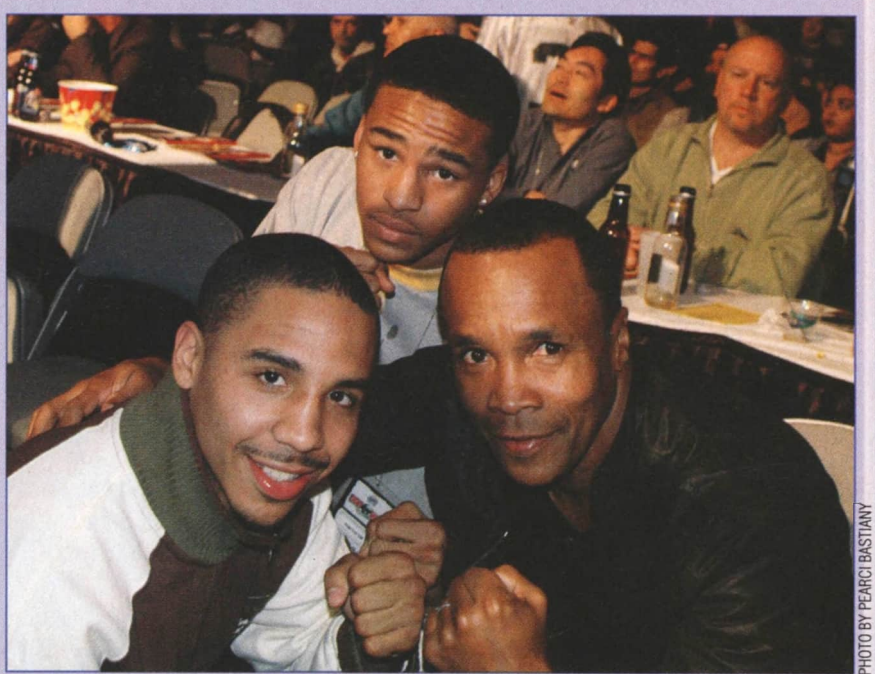


PHOTO BY PEARCI BASTIANY

Can Ward possibly be this generation's equivalent to fellow Olympic gold medalist Sugar Ray Leonard? It seems like a stretch, but there are many who see Ward as a highly marketable fighter. That's Ward's brother, Jonathan, in the background.

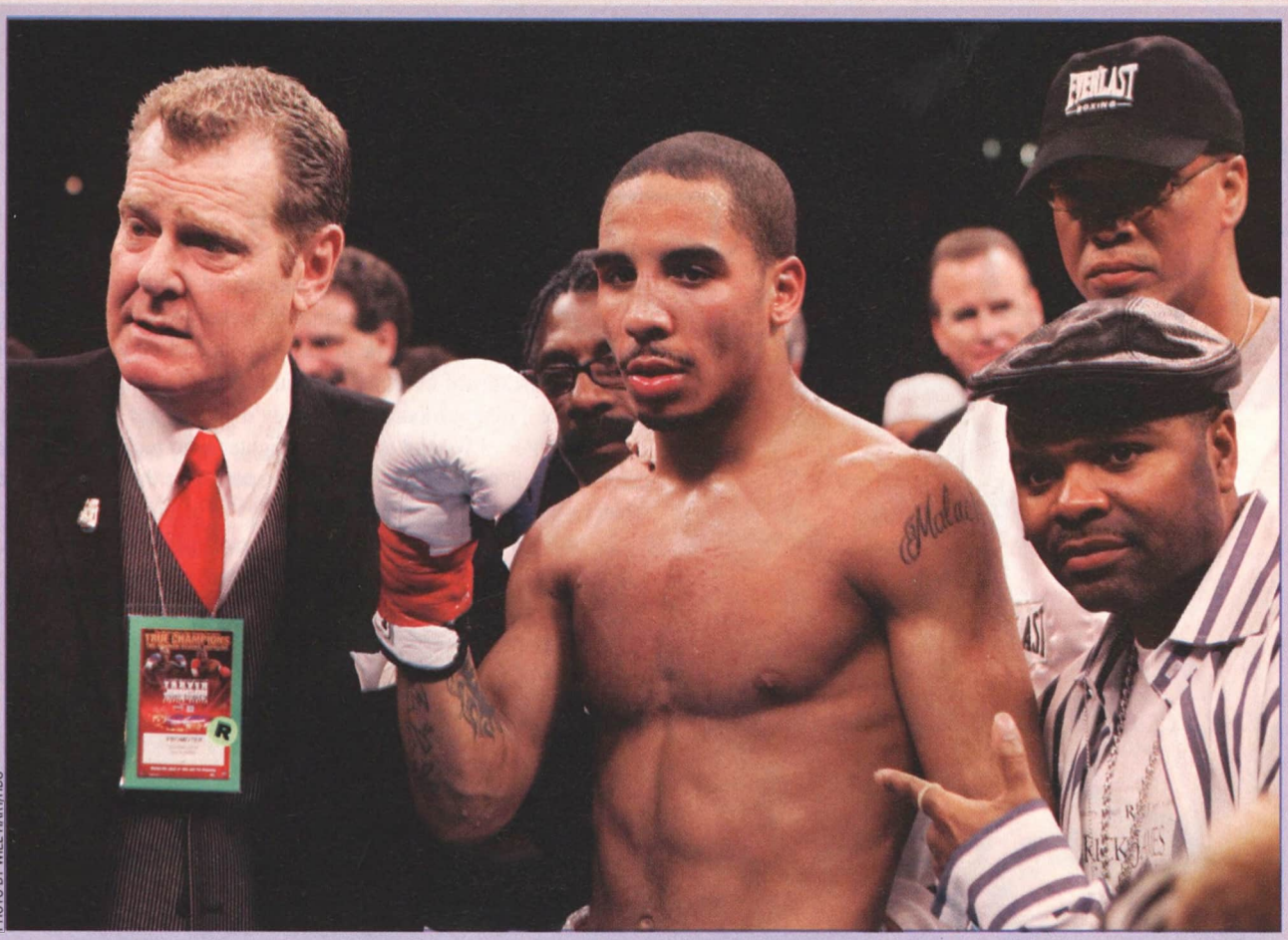


PHOTO BY WILL HART/HBO

Ward celebrates his first professional win with co-promoter Dan Goossen (left), manager James Prince (right, front), and trainer Virgil Hunter (right, back). Hunter has been with Ward since the fighter was nine years old, and has turned into a second father to him.

USA Today boxing writer Dan Rafael joked that Ward needs to work on his dunk before Goossen can start comparing him with James, but he echoed the maturity theme. Not only will it be an asset in terms of marketability, but it should also be key as he makes the transition from four-round amateur fights with shirts and headgear to the pro game.

Most, including Mitchell and Crumpacker, say Ward should have no problem transitioning to the pros. He's talented enough to lead with either hand and tough enough to outwork opponents. Mitchell believes Ward will have to do less holding and grabbing than he did in the amateurs. Rafael noted that he left his chin exposed a little too often against Molina.

Hunter said he trained Ward like a professional while he was an amateur. He had Ward envision his fights as the last four rounds of a close world title bout, with the idea being the fast, aggressive Ward would hit hard but often enough for it to register on the computer system.

"I think I'm gonna learn a lot on the job, so there's not too much pressure on us, as far as making adjustments," Ward said. "I just have to pay my dues and stay motivated. It's a new chapter of my life. I'm training hard every day and I'm dedicating myself from A to Z. I'm excited to see how I develop as a professional fighter."

The 6' Ward weighed in at 165 for his pro debut, seven pounds lighter than the weight he fought at while winning the light heavyweight gold in Athens. After chopping down trees to become a light heavyweight, Ward will be surprisingly strong at super middleweight and should be ready for world-class opposition before long, Hunter said.

With the talent level spread thin at 168, it's assumed that will happen sooner than it did for the 2000 Olympians. Lacy, for example, was a pro for three years eight months before he stopped Syd Vanderpool for the vacant IBF super middleweight title. Taylor has now been a pro for more than four years and still hasn't fought for a significant belt.

In the meantime, Goossen said he hopes to keep Ward fighting often, in front of large audiences, and against opponents with solid records. Goossen-Tutor has a multi-bout deal with *The Best Damn Sports Show Period*, so don't be surprised if you see Ward on the show a couple more times in 2005.

"As I get older, I have to learn not to pattern myself after anyone," Ward said. "I have to be Andre Ward. I want to rewrite the history book, I want to do things no one else has done. I want to do things no one has seen before. That's what motivates me in the gym every day."

And to think, it all started with a nine-year-old, a heavybag, a few nods, and a father who wanted the best for his boys. ■

Don Stewart covers boxing for the Reading (Pennsylvania) Eagle and is a frequent contributor to this magazine.

Update

By Robert Cassidy

As a group, old-school fighters disdained advancements in technology. They did roadwork in army boots and they ate steak and eggs the day of a fight. They did not build strength and muscle mass inside a weight room. Instead, they'd take an axe to a tree trunk.

Johnny Persol was an old-school fighter who took pride in dedicating himself to the traditions of his sport. But there came a time when he had to rely on modern technology to resume fighting.

In 1968, in the prime of his career, Persol suffered a torn retina in his left eye and retirement seemed like the only option. But there was a new technology emerging among eye physicians and Persol was desperate to fight again. The new treatment was laser eye surgery and it would forever change the impact a retinal injury had on a fighter's career. Persol cannot say for sure if he was the first fighter to undergo laser surgery to repair a torn retina. If not, he was certainly among the first.

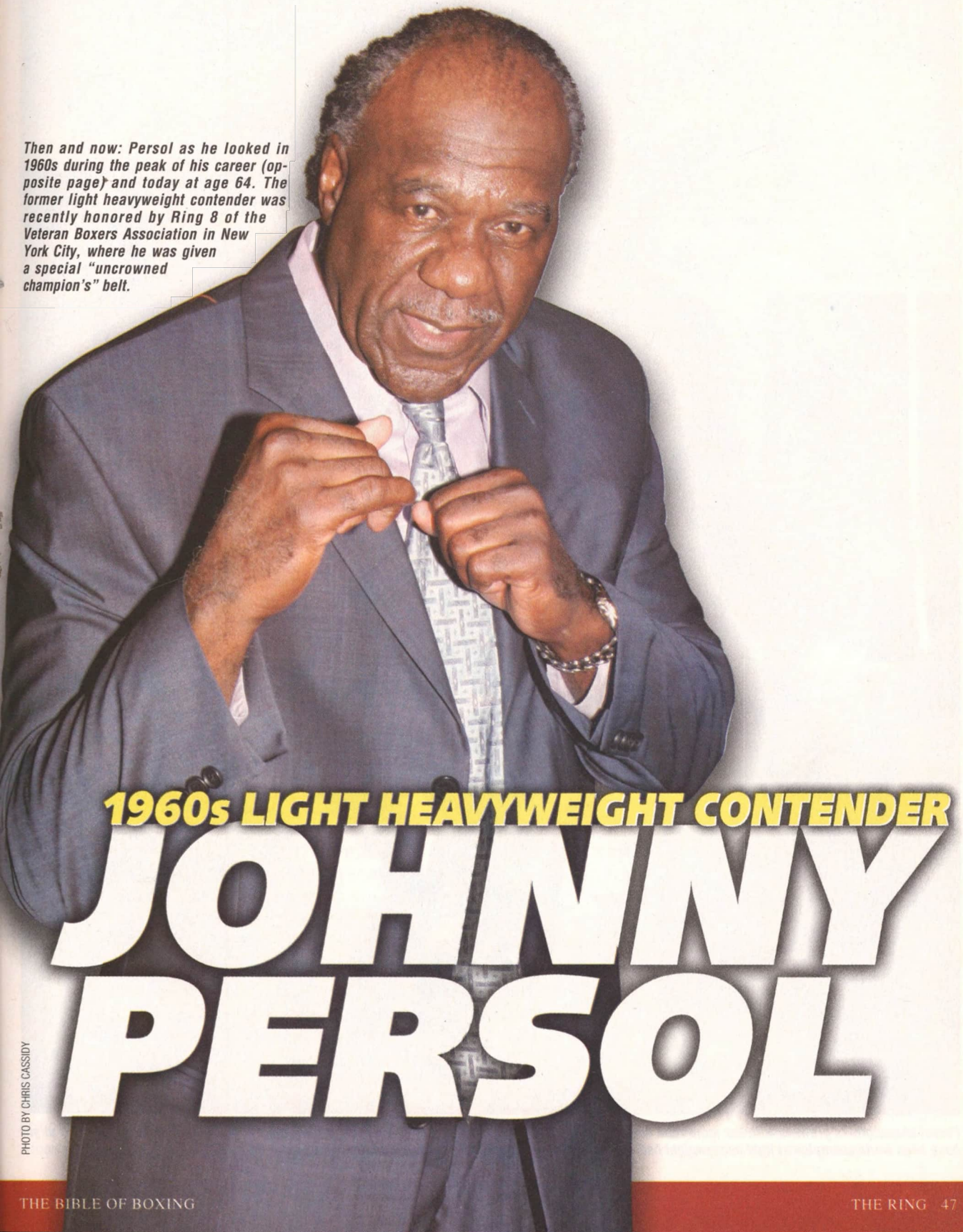
The surgery was a success, sort of. It bought Persol two more fights, but ultimately his vision and his career were never the same. Persol retired after a TKO loss to Jimmy Dupree on May 12, 1969, at Madison Square Garden. The fight took place exactly one month before his 29th birthday. Persol was a perennial contender, but had never challenged for a world title. After that bout, he knew he never would.

Today, fighters have come back from retinal injuries and won championships. Ask Johnny Persol about that, and all he offers is a smile and a shrug. There is not a trace of bitterness in the man.

"These things happen in life," he said. "I'm in good health. I'm training fighters now and I'm content."

In December, Persol was awarded the "uncrowned champion's belt," by Ring 8, New York City's chapter of the Veteran Boxers Association. The former contender was over-

"I Got Hit In The Eye And That Was The Beginning Of The End"

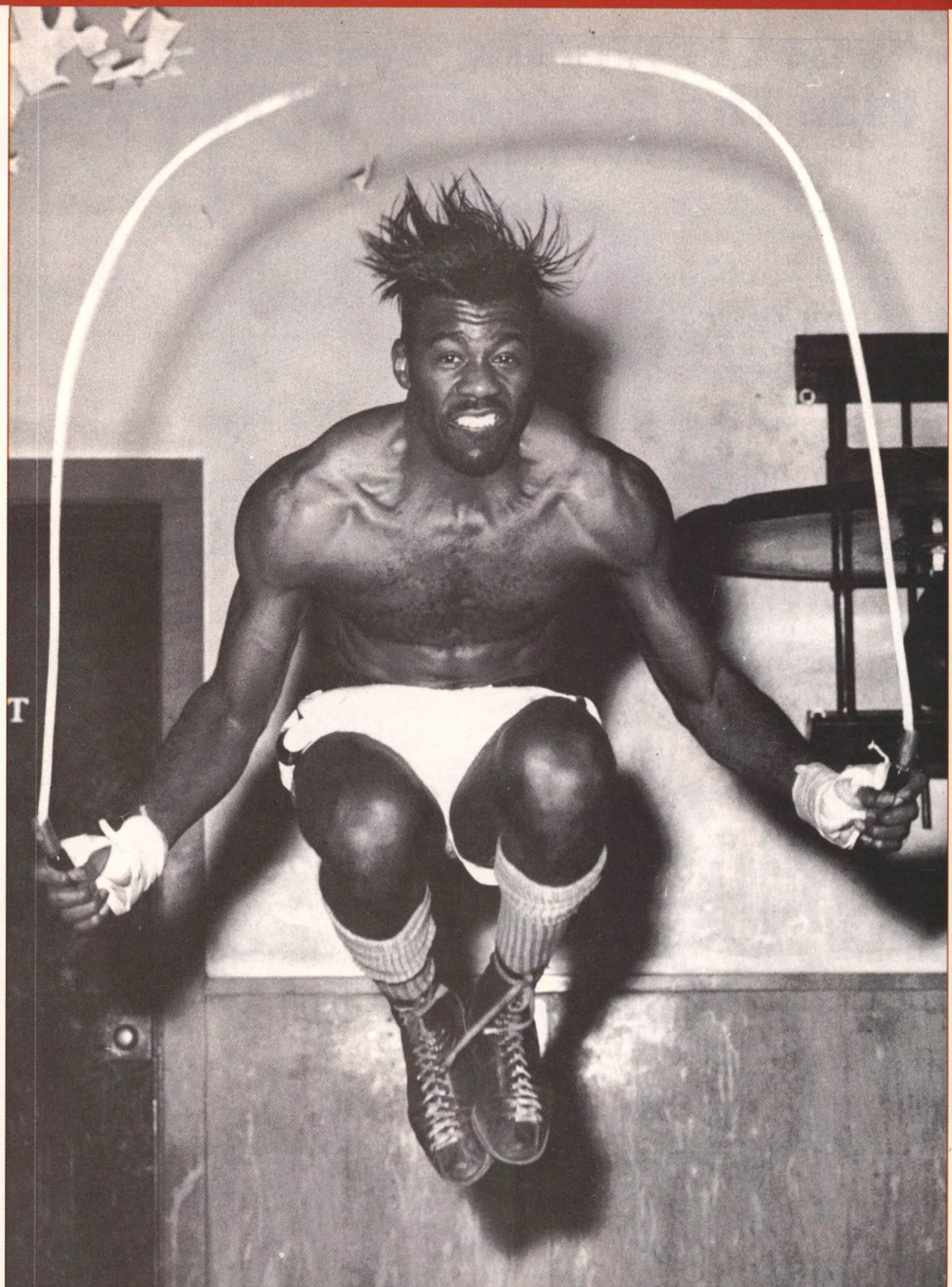


Then and now: Persol as he looked in 1960s during the peak of his career (opposite page) and today at age 64. The former light heavyweight contender was recently honored by Ring 8 of the Veteran Boxers Association in New York City, where he was given a special "uncrowned champion's" belt.

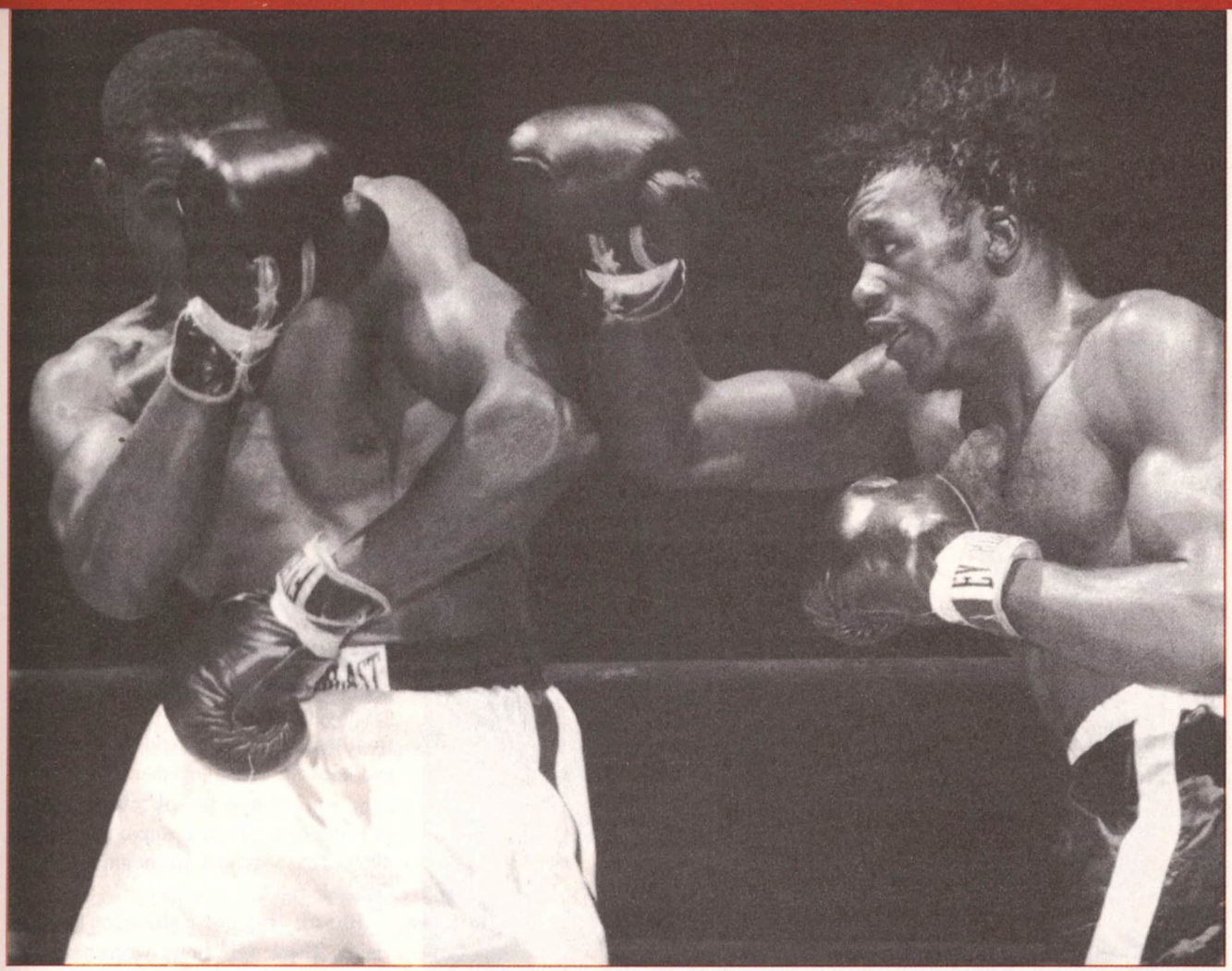
1960s LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT CONTENDER

JOHNNY PERSOL

PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY



Persol shows off his prowess with the jump rope during a hair-raising gym session. He was a regular performer at Madison Square Garden and might have been world champion at light heavyweight had it not been for eye injuries that terminated his career.



Persol has Eddie Cotton covering up during their February 1964 bout in New York that Persol won via 10-round decision. Beating a super-slick veteran such as Cotton in only his second year as a pro was a huge accomplishment.

whelmed by the crowd of 265 fans and fighters on hand at the Waterfront Crab House in Long Island City. Among those in attendance were Emile Griffith, Joe Miceli, Vince Shomo, Juan LaPorte, Chuck Wepner, Vinny Paz, and current Ring 8 President and former Persol sparring partner Henny Wallitsch.

"It was quite an honor," said Persol, who ended his career with a 22-5-1 (7) record. "I waited a long time for some kind of belt. It was great to get this and be there with all the fighters. It almost drove me to tears that people still remembered me. I was a pretty good light heavyweight in my time, and you wonder if all of it will be forgotten. This made it all worthwhile."

Those around the New York fight scene in the 1960s haven't forgotten Persol.

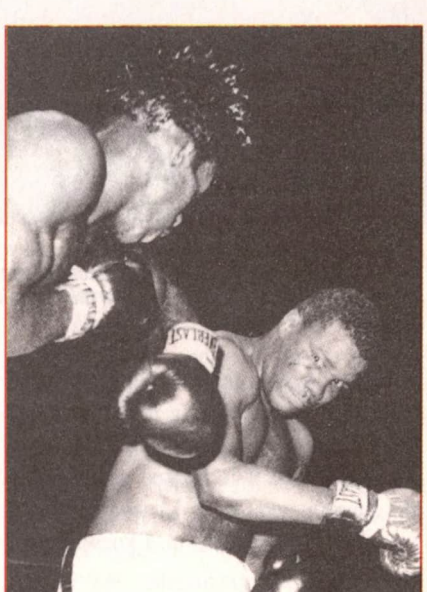
"He had the ability to go all the way," said Hall of Famer Gil Clancy, who trained Persol and co-managed him with Howie Albert. "He was a good all-around fighter and he had some very good wins."

"I think he had everything," said Wallitsch, who fought Ernie Terrell. "Persol could punch with either hand. And for a big guy, he had lateral movement. He was quick. The guy never made a mistake. I think his eye injury derailed him from being champion."

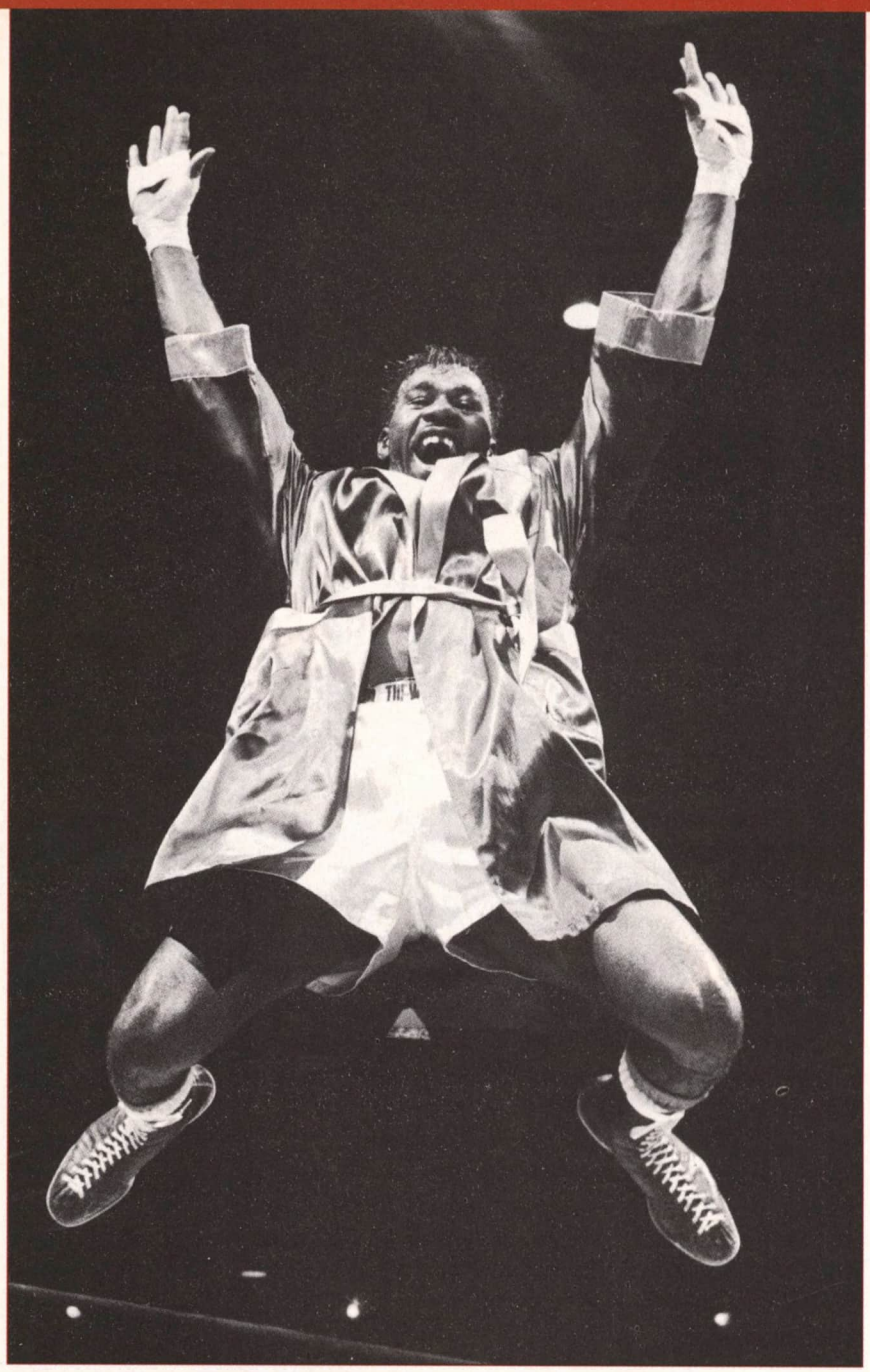
In 1964, just his second year as a pro, Persol began to make strides in the light heavyweight division. He split a pair of bouts with Eddie Cotton, beat Bobo Olson, and drew with Henry Hank. He closed out 1965 with a TKO win over Dupree and decisioned Harold Johnson and Herschel Jacobs early in the 1966 campaign.

He credits his wins over Hall of Famers Olson and Johnson as the fights that solidified him as a contender.

"I learned a lot fighting both of them," he said. "My youth and my speed made me a winner. But that's when I started to



Persol (left) and Henry Hank mix it up during their 10-round draw. Hank was among the many top-notch fighters Persol tangled with during a relatively brief pro career.



An ecstatic Persol jumps for joy following his unanimous decision victory over heavyweight Amos "Big Train" Lincoln in 1966. The victory began Persol's foray into the heavyweight division that ended when Jimmy Ellis stopped him the following year. Persol then returned to light heavy.

really believe in myself. That's when I came of age. Everything my corner told me to do in those fights, I was doing it and it worked. And if it worked against guys like Johnson and Olson, I knew that this is what it is to be successful. I knew I could be a good fighter."

Then, an odd thing happened to Persol's career. Just as he reached the elite among 175-pounders, he began fighting heavyweights. To close out the 1966 campaign, he scored unanimous decisions over James J. Woody and Amos Lincoln.

"Gil came to me and said, 'Fight this heavyweight,'" recalled Persol. "I said, 'What? A heavyweight?' Gil said, 'You can beat him.' And that was that. It never really mattered to me who I fought."

"We did that out of necessity," said Clancy. "We reached a point where he was running out of opposition at light heavyweight. No one wanted to fight him."

Persol's run ended in 1967 when future heavyweight titlist Jimmy Ellis knocked him out in one round. Ellis then entered the WBA's heavyweight elimination tournament and Persol returned to the light heavyweight division.

Persol reeled off four straight wins, but his career would never be the same after he beat Angel Oquendo on May 24, 1968, at Madison Square Garden. In the third round, Persol was hit in the left eye by an Oquendo punch and his vision began to blur.

"I was able to box," he said, "but I knew something was wrong with my eye. It seemed like it was getting darker. As the fight went on, it seemed like the eye was closing. The lights were growing dimmer and dimmer."

Those are the classic symptoms of a retinal injury. Left with few options at the time, Persol decided to gamble with technology and try the laser surgery. The essence of the surgery was that the heat from the laser would meld the torn tissue and keep the retina together. It seemed to have worked and Persol returned to the ring and beat Chuck Leslie on March 24, 1969. That was just 10 months after the Oquendo fight.

But all was not right with Persol's vision. There were times when his vision blurred after he was hit in the left eye during a fight or sparring session.

"Sometimes, I would get hit and see double," he said. "Sometimes, it was perfect. But back then if you had eye trouble, they didn't want you to fight. They didn't want to take chances."

Persol's vision was the subject of constant scrutiny, and it began to take a toll on the fighter's psyche. Also uncovered during an eye examination was an old injury that he traced back to a loss against Roger Rouse in 1964. An X-ray revealed that Persol had suffered a blowout fracture of the orbital bone beneath his left eye. When informed of the scarring, Persol immediately knew it was from the Rouse fight, which took place in Montana.

Persol said that he'd had the eye examined immediately after the fight and was told it was "probably a muscle injury" that would heal with time. He never followed up with doctors when he returned to New York, and the injury never healed properly. He believes now that the fracture contributed to his

PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

Persol and former sparring partner Henny Wallitsch pose with the belt that Persol was given by Ring 8. Wallitsch is the current president of that organization.

blurred vision and the misdiagnosis limited the success of his retinal surgery.

After the comeback win against Leslie, Persol fought Dupree, whom he'd stopped four years earlier, and was knocked out in the seventh round.

"The eye was a factor to a certain degree," he said. "I just wasn't myself and I got hit in the eye and that was the beginning of the end."

"I think the eye really held him back in that fight," said Clancy.

At the time, Persol was despondent and exiled himself from boxing. He took up work as a longshoreman and rarely ever watched a fight.

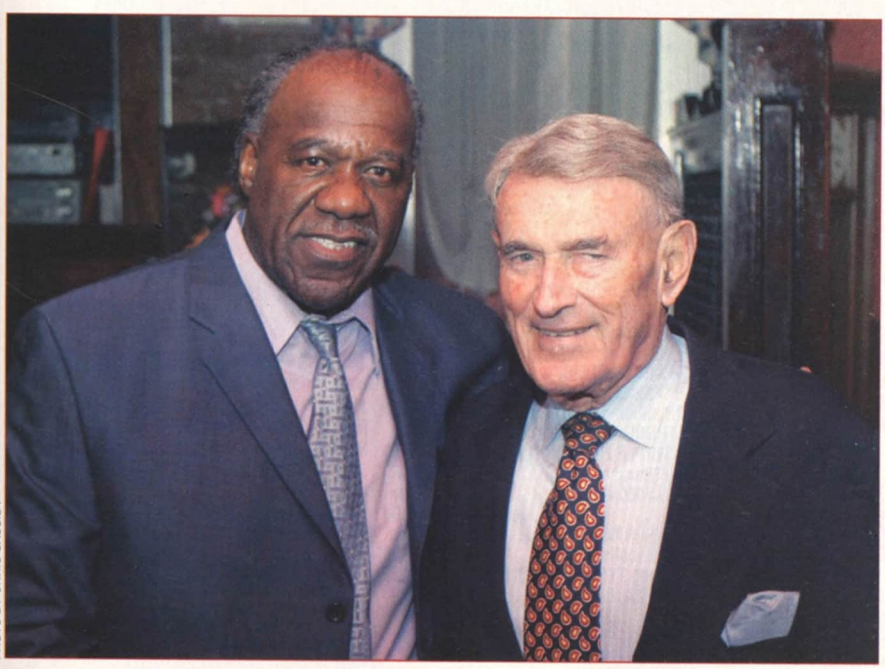


PHOTO BY CHRIS CASSIDY

Persol is reunited with Hall of Famer Gil Clancy, who trained and co-managed Persol along with Howie Albert. Clancy says Persol had the "ability to go all the way."

"I was hurt because I couldn't fight anymore," he said. "I had to get away from it."

His self-imposed banishment lasted a decade, until a friend coaxed him into attending a fight card at the Felt Forum. He ran into Clancy and Griffith, his former stablemate, and before long he started training fighters at the Times Square Gym in Manhattan. In the late-'70s he worked with Davey Moore, Larry Alexander, and Bobby Joe Young.

Although no fighter ever sought his advice regarding a retinal injury, Persol remembers thinking that Sugar Ray Leonard was making a mistake when he returned to boxing in 1982. Leonard suffered a detached retina, which was worse than Persol's injury.

"At first, I wasn't sure about it, but when I heard his vision was restored, I thought he would be okay," said Persol. "Doctors have made a lot of progress since my time."

In his time, Persol came closer than most to fighting for the championship. He was promised a title fight on the condition that he beat Dupree a second time. He also believes that had he defeated Ellis, he would have been invited to participate in the WBA heavyweight elimination tournament.

"I can't dwell on what happened in the past," said Persol. "If I do, it will drive me insane. I thank God that I have my health and all my marbles. I have no regrets. But I do wonder sometimes if I decided to have the eye looked at, what could have been."

Persol, who is 64, lives in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and has been a longshoreman for the last 36 years. He works on the New Jersey docks and was recently promoted to shop steward. He remains active in boxing by training young fighters at the Lopez Boxing Club in Newark.

"When they come in, their eyes are wide open," he said. "It's a great feeling. When they win, I see the joy they have. It's the same joy I had all those years ago. Boxing changes their whole life."

Boxing changed Johnny Persol's life too. While he is now comfortable with his boxing legacy, it is natural to wonder if his career was a blessing or a curse.

Perhaps it was both. ■

Robert Cassidy is a former associate editor of this magazine and a frequent contributor.

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SUMMARY

HEAVYWEIGHTS
Tony Tubbs W 10 Brian Minto
Kevin Johnson W 8 Will Cook

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
Silvio Branco KO 5 Sasha Mitrevski

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Fulgencio Zuniga KO 12 David Lopez
Danny Perez W 10 Dewey Welliver
Emmett Linton W 10 Marcos Primera
Jesus Gonzales KO 2 Abdias Castillo
Alfredo Angulo W 4 Tomas Padron

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHTS
Marteze Logan W 10
Luis Alberto Santiago

WELTERWEIGHTS
Maxim Nesterenko D 10 Riad Menasria

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHTS
Karim Netchaoui D 8 Stephane Malenou

LIGHTWEIGHTS
Saddam Kietyongyuth KO 4 Renato Inal

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS
Gamaliel Diaz W 10 Sandro Marcos
Verquan Kimbrough KO 1
Terrell Hargrove

FEATHERWEIGHTS
Saohin Sithchai Condo KO 11 Alfren Bulala
Cristobal Cruz KO 4 Jose Navarette
Hiroyuki Enoki KO 7 Akinori Kanai
Chonlatarn Piriyapinyo KO 5
Nathan Barcelona
Terdsak Jandaeng KO 4 Man-Deuk Park
Isidro Granados W 8 John Nolasco
Eric Aiken KO 2 Terrence Roy

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS
Israel Vazquez KO 5 Art Simonyan
(Retains IBF Title)
Turcay Kaya KO 6 Emiliano Salvini
Abner Mares KO 2 Luis Malave

BANTAMWEIGHTS
Adonis Rivas W 12 Davis Arosemena
Chatchai Sasakul KO 2
Saithong Sriprajan
Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym KO 3
Jake Verano

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHTS
Katsushige Kawashima W 12
Jose Navarro
(Retains WBC Title)
Pramuansak Posuwan W 12 Isidro Lorona

FLYWEIGHTS
Lorenzo Parra W 12 Trash Nakanuma
(Retains WBA Title)
Nerys Espinoza KO 1 Juan Alvarez
Juan Palacios KO 5 Erick Aguilar
Panomroonglek Kratingdaenggym KO 7
Allan Ranada
Julio David Roque Ler KO 7 Pedro Miranda

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHTS
Shin Ono W 6 Naoto Saito

PHOTO BY TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Trash Nakanuma exchanges with flyweight titleholder Lorenzo Parra

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The RING

FIGHTER *of the* MONTH

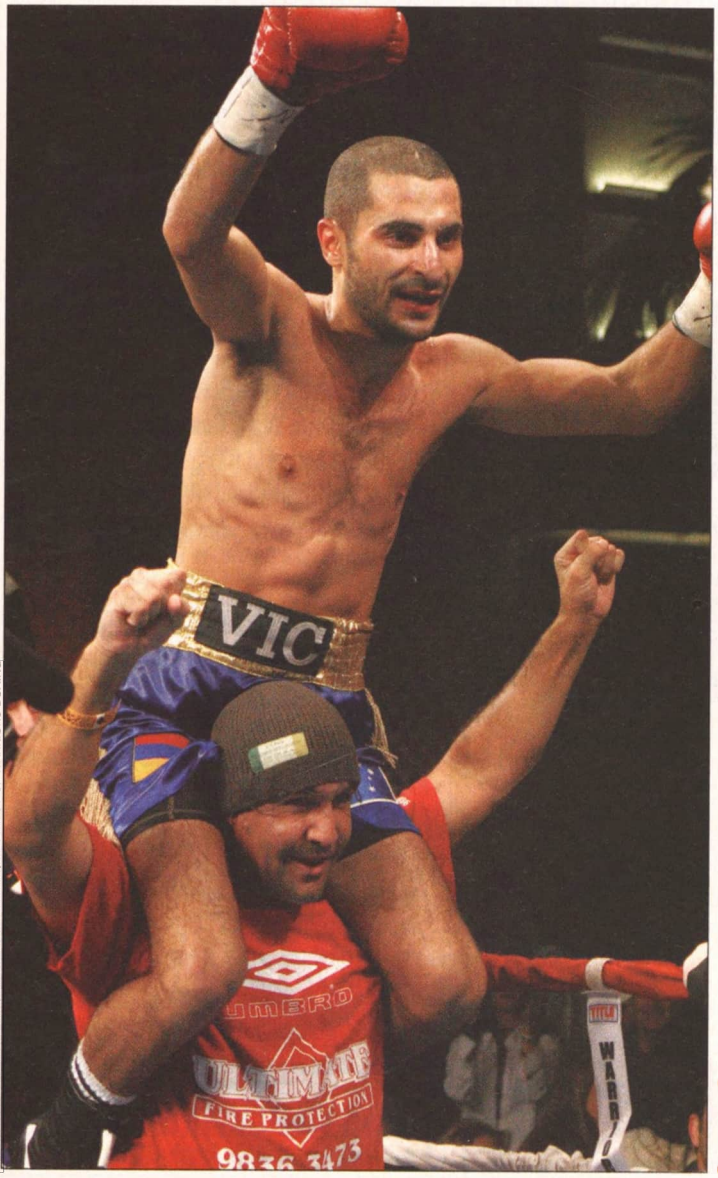


PHOTO BY BRUCE R. QUIROZ/ELEMENTAL STUDIOS/COURTESY OF WARRIORS BOXING

Fighters who make it through more than 10 years of professional boxing without losing usually don't do so by accident. Several respected flyweights—Angel Priolo, Pedro Pena, Hawk Makepula, Alejandro Montiel, Damaen Kelly—had their chances to snap Irene Pacheco's unbeaten string, but none of them could.

But Vic Darchinyan hadn't gone undefeated through four years and 21 fights by accident either. And when it was his turn to try to take the IBF title from Pacheco, he turned in a magnificent performance, keeping his perfect record intact while ruining Pacheco's.

Darchinyan is known as "The Raging Bull," but he didn't need to flash a Jake LaMotta-like chin or stage a dramatic final-round comeback to win this one. The Australia-based Armenian was in control almost the entire fight before dropping Pacheco twice and stopping him in the 11th. Will he eventually end up divorced six times and performing a nightclub act? That's hard to say. But what we can say is that he's the Fighter of the Month—and that's no bull.

• • • •

Vic Darchinyan

RINGSIDE REPORTS

Miguel Cotto KO 6 Randall Bailey

Las Vegas, Nevada: In the junior welterweight division, probably the hottest weight class in boxing, it's not easy to reach the elite. But Cotto now has. When talking about the top guys, you have to throw Cotto's name into the mix along with Kostya Tszyu, Arturo Gatti, Ricky Hatton, Vivian Harris, and Floyd Mayweather. The 24-year-old Cotto inched closer to the top by totally dominating former 140-pound beltholder Bailey, putting him down twice and stopping him in the sixth round.

In the opening round at the Mandalay Bay Events Center, in the chief supporting bout to Vitali Klitschko-Danny Williams, Cotto, 140, Caguas, Puerto Rico, started, as usual, slower than his opponent. Bailey, 139½, Miami, Florida, was the aggressor as the 2000 Olympian retreated to the ropes. Two good right hands, Bailey's best weapon, hit Cotto on the chin, but had no effect on the Puerto Rican. Bailey, 30, won the first round on the scorecards of two of the judges sitting at ringside, but after that, it was all Cotto, as he started to work Bailey's body with thunderous left and right hooks.

Bailey, 28-5 (27), went down from a right to the chin in the second and fell again in the third thanks to a left hook to the body. Cotto, 22-0 (18), opened a cut on Bailey's left eye and was continuously punishing him with powerful bodyshots that made Bailey bend over every time Cotto got near him.

Cotto came out in the fifth and played with Bailey, moving around the ring only using his jab. In the sixth, the budding superstar showed more of his skillful boxing moves. Cotto would move in, slipping punches, then let go crushing left and right hands to Bailey's ribs. Every shot was now hurting Bailey, and referee Norm Budden (USA) stepped in to call a halt to the action at 1:39 of round six, awarding Cotto a TKO victory.

Cotto was in a car accident in 2001 and has a titanium rod in his right shoulder. He said, "My right hand is not as good as it used to be before the accident. [Bailey] has a really good right hand. We really worked hard to get ready for this fight. We knew he didn't take it too good to the body. We knew to take it to his body, and we did."

"He was a strong kid," Bailey said. "He was better than I thought. He was very active and threw a lot of punches. It was not his power, but the volume. I did not hit him with my best shots. His defense was good. I could not get in to the position to land the kind of punches I wanted."

Perhaps DeMarcus Corley will have better luck. Corley, who also holds a win over Bailey and is ranked in THE RING's top 10, is expected to be Cotto's next opponent.

Television: HBO Pay-Per-View
Promoters: K2 Promotions, Top Rank
(12-11-04)
Wayne McCullough

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Bailey crashes down against rising star Cotto

Carlos Hernandez W 10 Juan Carlos Ramirez

Las Vegas, Nevada: If you want to see an exciting fight, just watch "Famous" Hernandez. You will rarely be disappointed. In his first fight since losing the IBF 130-pound title to Erik Morales, Hernandez took on three-time title challenger Ramirez in a bloodbath, winning a split decision over 10 hard rounds on the Klitschko-Williams undercard.

The fight was close and difficult to score for the first seven rounds, as both fighters enjoyed moments of success. Hernandez, 41-4-1 (24), started with his aggressive, all-action, come-forward style, as Ramirez, 34-7 (14), was backing up but throwing more punches than his adversary.

PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA

Ramirez and Hernandez let the plasma and the punches fly

An accidental headbutt opened up a bad cut over the right eye of Hernandez in the second round, and blood streamed down the side of his face. The blood continued to flow throughout the 10 rounds. Referee Kenny Bayless (USA) consulted with the doctor a few times, but never came close to stopping the fight.

The turning point came in the eighth when Hernandez, 132½, West Covina, California, landed a solid left hook as Ramirez, 132½, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, dropped his right hand. The punch hit Ramirez flush on the chin and sent the Mexican to the canvas. He got up as the bell sounded.

The final two rounds were controlled by Hernandez. He piled on the pressure with lefts and rights to Ramirez' ribs. A good right-left combination hurt Ramirez in the last round. The crowd at the Mandalay Bay Events Center gave the fighters a standing ovation at the final bell.

All three judges gave the last three rounds to Hernandez, and it was just enough to win him the fight. Judge Paul Smith (USA) scored the bout 96-94 for Ramirez, but he was overruled by Robert Hoyle (USA), who saw it 95-94 for Hernandez, and Chuck Giampa (USA), who had it 96-93 for Hernandez. THE RING also gave the last three rounds to Hernandez and had the same score as Giampa.

"I thought I won the first seven rounds, outboxing him," Ramirez argued. "I played with him the first seven rounds and I deserved to win. I made a mistake (that led to the knockdown), but it shouldn't have cost me the fight. I did my job."

Hernandez said of Ramirez, "He was one of the dirtiest fighters I have ever faced. I had a bad cut. I had a lot to overcome. I really thought Bayless was going to deduct a point or two because of Ramirez' dirty tactics, but he didn't, and I still won the fight."

Television: HBO Pay-Per-View

Promoters: K2 Promotions, Top Rank

(12-11-04)

Wayne McCullough

Manny Pacquiao KO 4 Fahsan 3K-Battery

Taguig City, Philippines: American promoter Murad Muhammad tried to convince Filipino fight fans that Thai challenger Fahsan was a destroyer of Filipinos, and that world featherweight champion Pacquiao had better watch out. Fahsan, Murad kept shouting to the high heavens on various trips to Manila to promote the match, had knocked out more than 20 Filipinos (an exaggerated statistic) en route to compiling a respectable 44-7-1 (23) record.

But anyone who spends any time following boxing in Asia closely knew that those statistics didn't mean much. It's depressingly common in these parts to feed decent prospects a steady diet of below-average cannon fodder, with no-hopers being shuttled between the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand, pocketing a few hundred bucks to get their brains beat in, all to make the homeboy look like a hot commodity.

Fahsan played along with the whole charade, telling the local media that he knew of a secret soft spot on Pacquiao's body, and that Filipino fans would wake up the morning after the fight and read some shocking headlines in their daily papers.

For Pacquiao, it was actually a dangerous fight to take, if only because he had zero to gain and just about everything to lose, including several major paydays in the United States in 2005. Pacquiao, 125, stepped into the ring at the outdoor venue known as The Fort fit, ready, and flashing a relaxed smile. Although he weighed in one pound heavier than Fahsan, by fight time he appeared much bigger than the Thai.

From the opening bell, it was apparent that Fahsan couldn't win. Pacquiao came out ready to fight, swarming all over the Thai with a stunning variety of lightning quick punches coming from every conceivable angle in a breathtaking display of pure firepower. Fahsan bravely stood his ground and tried to fight back. Round two featured a similar onslaught, with Pacquiao all business and a game Fahsan unable to offer an answer. After brutally pounding the Thai, Pac-Man moved in and landed three quick rights followed by a crushing left that sent Fahsan to the mat. He quickly got up, but the end was clearly in sight. The one-sided action continued in round three with more of the same. Again, Fahsan absorbed terrible punishment and fell to the canvas, this time as the bell rang to end the round.

The finish came in round four in brilliantly brutal fashion. Pacquiao, 25, has always had a dynamite-laden left, but trainer Freddie Roach has helped him develop a weapon in his right hand. The southpaw had been using his right hand brilliantly throughout the fight, leading with the jab, the hook, and even the

right uppercut. Nearly a minute into the round, Pacquiao set up a tired-looking Fahsan, 30, with several of these rights, then quickly stepped in and landed as vicious a left uppercut as a featherweight can land, lifting the Thai off his feet and then down to the floor. Fahsan beat the count, but just seconds later, Pacquiao did it again, leading with several hard rights then crushing Fahsan with another left uppercut. As the challenger fell to the canvas, referee Ferdie Estrella (Philippines) immediately waved it off at 1:26, much to the delight of the crowd of approximately 20,000.

Afterward, Fahsan commented that he had never seen such blazing speed as displayed by Pacquiao, 39-2-2 (30). Pacquiao is in for a much tougher fight his next time out, when he takes on fellow pound-for-pounder Erik Morales in March.

Promoter: Murad Muhammad
(12-11-04)
Ted Lerner

PHOTO BY JOHN GICHIGI/GETTY IMAGES

Hatton rocks Oliveira on his way to becoming the first to knock him out

Ricky Hatton KO 10 Ray Oliveira

London, England: While Kostya Tszyu, the world junior welterweight champion, yearns to encounter the sport's biggest names, like Arturo Gatti or even Oscar De La Hoya, his next engagement will be against Hatton. Though some might label Hatton undeserving or the fight a mismatch, Hatton, 139½, Manchester, England, took steps toward suggesting otherwise when he became the first man to stop 36-year-old veteran Oliveira, 139½, New Bedford, Massachusetts, at the ExCel Arena. Hatton was impressive, handing out a severe beating. But his job on June 5, the date proposed for his bout against Tszyu, will be far more forbidding.

"It's a big test against a great fighter, but the better the opponent, the better I'll be," Hatton insisted.

Tszyu greeted the announcement of their meeting with less enthusiasm: "I'm excited to be fighting Ricky because I believe he's a worthy challenger," Tszyu said. "But it's very disappointing because I personally think that a fight with Gatti would be sensational. Somebody thinks differently. It's a shame that the networks can't get this fight together or the promoters can't get this fight together."

But the prospects for Tszyu-Hatton are exciting nonetheless, an aggressive puncher who digs formidably to the body against a brilliant all-around tactician, one of the finest fighters pound-for-pound in the world. Tszyu is 35, but he shows no signs of his skills eroding. At 26, Hatton is coming into his prime, and he had far too much in his arsenal for Oliveira, 47-10-2 (22), who was brave but outgunned.

Hatton came out of his corner like a tempest, catching the American with a left and right that registered clearly in his face. Another hard right and a left uppercut went in before Hatton began in earnest to seek out his opponent's body. Oliveira was not even considering an attack of his own, so preoccupied was he merely with survival. Midway through the round, a right hand around the corner of Oliveira's left glove landed square on his chin, and for only the fourth time in his career, he was on the floor.

But the American veteran climbed to his feet, got his guard in tight, and went back to war. For round after round, Hatton followed trainer Billy Graham's instructions to "keep banging away." Hatton threw a left uppercut in round two that distressed Oliveira. But he withstood the Mancunian's attack better and did the same in the third when he began even to fire in several right hands that Hatton had to be wary of.

It was all Hatton after that, however. From the fifth, Oliveira was reduced almost to a punching bag, and "The Hitman" maintained the pressure until the end came in the 10th. A right hand landed on Oliveira's ear and he went down in a corner, taking English referee Mickey Vann's 10-count on one knee to end his night of pain.

"I was pleased with my performance and now I'm focused on Tszyu," said Hatton, 38-0 (28). "Bring him on."

Promoter: Sports Network
(12-11-04)
Brian Doogan

Vic Darchinyan KO 11 Irene Pacheco

Hollywood, Florida: You knew longtime IBF flyweight titleholder Pacheco's ridiculously inactive fighting schedule would catch up with him eventually. Having won the belt in April 1999

and fought just six times in the five years and eight months since, Pacheco, 33, had become an ex-titlist waiting to happen. Appropriately, the unbeaten Darchinyan, 28, who turned pro after Pacheco's reign began but fought 21 times over a span in which Pacheco competed just four times, was the man who took advantage of the Colombian's vulnerability. The Australian controlled most of the action at the Seminole Paradise adjacent to the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel-Casino and scored a TKO at 0:44 of the 11th round.

The early rounds belonged to the little-known Darchinyan, 111½, who fought with a ferocity somewhat reminiscent of how his manager/trainer, Jeff Fenech, once fought. In the middle rounds, however, Pacheco, 112, staged a rally, connecting with his share of effective bodyshots.

A bizarre 10-minute interruption occurred between rounds eight and nine, as referee Jorge Alonso (USA) called a timeout due to fireworks being set off near the outdoor facility. After the action resumed, Pacheco quickly became a dud and started having major problems keeping his punches up. The defending titleholder lost a point in round nine and two more in round 10 for hitting below the belt.

The points quickly became immaterial, however. At the end of the 10th, Darchinyan, 22-0 (17), dropped Pacheco, 29-1 (22), with a left hook, and early in the following round, another hook floored the Colombian, prompting Alonso to call a halt.

Promoter: Warriors Boxing Promotions

(12-16-04)

Katsushige Kawashima W 12 Jose Navarro

Tokyo, Japan: Game Kawashima, 115, Yokohama, Japan, barely kept the WBC super flyweight belt as he eked out a split but well-received decision over previously unbeaten top contender Navarro, 114½, Los Angeles, California, over 12 hard-fought, highly entertaining rounds. The discrepancy on the scoresheets was noteworthy. Gelasio Perez (Mexico) had it 115-114 for Kawashima, and Noparat Sricharoen (Thailand) had it 115-113 for the defending titlist, but William Boodhoo (Canada) scored the fight 120-109 for Navarro. The referee was Mark Green (England).

Navarro was much more technically proficient, but Kawashima, making his second defense, showed more power in swapping punches with the southpaw challenger. As a result, both ways of scoring the bout seemed defensible. One could argue that Kawashima edged out the crafty challenger by a close margin due to his superior aggressiveness, or one could say Navarro was far superior to the bleeding champ from the viewpoint of skill, despite his lack of power (though Boodhoo's tally seemed quite extreme). THE RING saw it a draw at 114-114.

The 23-year-old Navarro, a 2000 U.S. Olympian, got off to a good start, throwing many southpaw jabs and connecting with light but accurate combinations to seemingly sweep the first three rounds. Kawashima, 29, occasionally landed big shots, but he also missed plenty, and he sustained a cut on his right eyelid in the second round caused by a punch from the lefty challenger.

Kawashima turned loose with a flurry of punches in the fourth, winning back a point. In the fifth, the titleholder was cut over the left eyebrow by a clash of heads, and the blood flow was heavy, but he kept the pressure on to earn another round.

From then on, it became a see-saw affair. The sixth was taken by Navarro, who displayed precision combos while Kawashima often hit the air with roundhouse shots. Kawashima began to effectively attack the breadbasket of the lanky southpaw in the seventh, but the unbeaten challenger was in command in the eighth thanks to his accurate rallies.

Kawashima was at his best in the ninth, as he unleashed many solid bodyshots to the fading challenger, displayed heavier blows in combinations, and landed vicious left hooks. But in round 10, Navarro fought back well with light but accurate counterpunches.

The 11th saw Kawashima aim at the midsection and Navarro target his foe's face. Kawashima's combos seemed more effective in weakening his opponent. Aware that it was a close affair, Kawashima desperately exerted all his energy with a rough-and-tumble attack in the 12th, while Navarro covered up and occasionally responded to the beltholder's wild rallies.

The crowd roared jubilantly when the official verdict was announced in favor of the local fighter. The bloodied Kawashima, 28-3 (18), looked not unlike Vito Antuofermo when he barely kept his throne against Marvelous Marvin Hagler in their first encounter. Japanese people praised the fighting spirit Kawashima showed in his last surge, though they also appreciated Navarro's skill. Navarro, 21-

PHOTO BY TORU YAMANAKA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Navarro uppercuts Kawashima en route to disputed decision loss

1 (9), however, failed to do enough down the stretch to take the belt.

But that wasn't how Navarro's promoter, Lou DiBella, saw it.

"He did everything but knock the champion out, and was robbed," DiBella told the press the week after the fight. "The damage done, both emotionally and financially, to a kid like Jose is immeasurable." DiBella immediately began pushing for a rematch.

Promoter: Ohashi Promotions

(1-3-04)

Joe Koizumi

Lorenzo Parra W 12 Trash Nakanuma

Tokyo, Japan: Unbeaten Parra, 111½, Venezuela, successfully retained the WBA flyweight belt as he gave a boxing lesson to Japanese challenger Nakanuma, 111¼, and withstood his late surge to pound out a unanimous decision over 12 fast rounds in the co-feature to the controversial Kawashima-Navarro bout. The scoring went as follows: Raul Caiz Sr. (USA) and Erkki Meronen (Finland) both 116-112, and Ungmyong Bae (Korea) 115-113, all for the speedy titlist. The referee was Armando Garcia (USA).

The slick beltholder controlled the first five rounds with ease, since Nakanuma threw little more than an occasional, inaccurate, looping left hook. Parra, making his third defense since dethroning Eric Morel in Puerto Rico in 2003, kept throwing jabs at the peek-a-boo stylist, who blocked almost all of Parra's punches, but neglected to positively respond to his attack with offense of his own. Whenever Nakanuma attacked, he threw one punch at a time, a strategy that was easily solved by the crafty Venezuelan.

In the sixth, the 29-year-old Nakanuma suddenly became aggressive and stalked Parra, 26, with continual combinations to the face and midsection, winning a point. Moving to-and-fro and side-to-side, Parra took back the initiative and did well in the seventh through the 10th. The Venezuelan averted almost all of Nakanuma's punches, though he still could not penetrate the challenger's tight guard.

Though the crowd sensed it was a lopsided affair, the fight turned to a degree in the last two sessions. In the 11th, Nakanuma furiously unleashed heavy shots in combination and caught Parra with his trademark left hooks to the face and belly. Parra tried to grab the ferocious challenger to save himself from the onslaught. The final session saw Nakanuma attempt to score a come-from-behind knockout, while Parra desperately kept clinching and holding. Just 10 seconds prior to the final bell, Nakanuma exploded a vicious overhand right that made Parra groggy. The Venezuelan dropped just after the bell sounded, and the referee correctly ruled that it was not a knockdown, as the time had expired.

Nakanuma, 25-6 (11), should have started his fireworks much earlier, but he simply waited too long to open up. It was a great disappointment for the Japanese audience. It was very clear that Parra, 25-0 (17), was the victor on points, regardless of Nakanuma's late rally.

Promoter: Teiken Promotions

(1-3-04)

Joe Koizumi

Isaac Bustos KO 4 Eagle Kyowa

Tokyo, Japan: Game Mexican underdog Bustos, 105, surprisingly—and in a rather fluky manner—captured the WBC 105-pound belt as he was awarded a TKO victory over previously unbeaten Eagle, 105, Japan, due to the defending titlist suffering a dislocated shoulder. The end came at 19 seconds of the fourth round.

The ending was bizarre and abrupt. Eagle, 26, who had dethroned Jose Antonio Aguirre by a near-shutout decision in Tokyo in January '04, was in complete command in the first two rounds, battering the slower challenger from all angles. Eagle, making his second defense, was controlling the fight until he dislocated his right shoulder midway through round three. The cause of the injury was not apparent. Bustos, 24-6-3 (13), turned loose and attacked the titleholder, while Eagle tried to fight back with just one arm. During the recess after the third, the cornermen did their best effort to fix his shoulder, but their efforts were in vain.

No sooner had the fourth round commenced than Eagle, 13-1 (5), complained of pain, turned his back to the challenger, and quit. Referee Toby Gibson (USA) promptly raised the hand of the jubilant, 29-year-old Mexican. The official tallies from the three American judges, James Jen-Kin, Gerald Ritter, and Edward Kugler, were identical: all 29-28 for Eagle.

Promoter: Kadoebi Jewel Promotions

(12-18-04)

Joe Koizumi

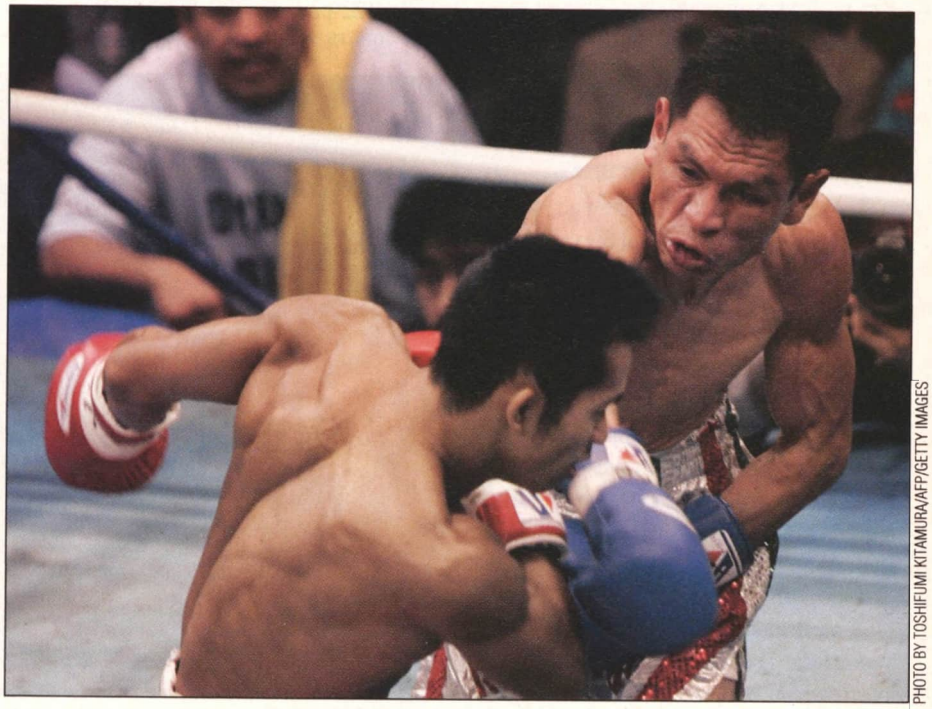


PHOTO BY TOSHIFUMI KITAMURA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Bustos rips Eagle with a right

Israel Vazquez KO 5 Art Simonyan

El Cajon, California: Vazquez' first defense of the IBF 122-pound title, against unbeaten mandatory challenger and former sparring partner Simonyan, seemed on paper like it might be difficult. But Vazquez put on a stellar show, Simonyan proved far from up to the task, and the titleholder had an easy night of it, blowing out the older but less experienced pro inside five rounds before a crowd of 400 at the intimate Sycuan Casino.

Simonyan became a top-10 contender in THE RING—and somehow a number-one contender according to the IBF—by scoring wins over a trio of title challengers, Radford Beasley, Carlos Contreras, and Fahsan 3K-Battery. But beating fellow fringe contenders is apparently about as far as the Armenian, now based in Glendale, California, is meant to go. Vazquez, 121¼, West Covina, California, via Mexico, was much too fast for Simonyan, repeatedly beating him to the punch. Vazquez' quick jabs and straight right hands got through time and again, and though Simonyan, 121½, was game and willing to exchange, he was constantly getting the worst of it.

In round three, a counter right hand from Vazquez, 27, dropped Simonyan for the first time. After the challenger rose, Vazquez ripped open a cut under his left eye with another right hand, then landed several heavy uppercuts, followed by another right that produced a second knockdown. The bell saved the 29-year-old Simonyan from any further damage, and then a five-minute break to replace Vazquez' torn left glove allowed him plenty of time to recover. But all it did was delay an unavoidable conclusion.

Early in the fifth round, Vazquez struck with another right hand, and the overmatched Simonyan, 14-1-1 (7), dropped again. He beat the count and was allowed to continue, but when Vazquez pounced once more, referee Dr. James Jen Kin (USA) stopped the fight 59 seconds into the round.

"I'm looking for tougher fights," said Vazquez, 37-3 (28), who promptly called out Oscar Larios. Vazquez has already split a pair of fights with Larios, the man ranked number one at 122 pounds by just about every reasonable observer.

(12-28-04)

Markus Beyer W 12 Yoshinori Nishizawa

Bayreuth, Germany: In the end, victory was conclusive enough, but Beyer, 166¾, Cologne, Germany, did suffer the embarrassment of being knocked to the canvas in the second round and was unable to kayo Nishizawa, 167, Tokyo, Japan, a fighter whose only previous exposure at this level resulted in a fifth-round stoppage defeat by Australia's Anthony Mundine in January 2004. This was Beyer's first defense of the WBC super middleweight title that he won for the third time by stopping Italy's Cristian Sanavia in the sixth round in October.

A most interested observer was another Australian, Danny Green, who lost by a controversial disqualification to Beyer in August 2003 and now has a mandated rematch coming. Green was especially heartened by Beyer's spotty performance.

"All respect to him, but I don't think Nishizawa is really a world-championship fighter and for him to go the distance sends me a message that Markus Beyer isn't on top of his game," declared Green. "I think Markus Beyer's confidence has taken a real dent since I got disqualified against him. Mentally and physically, I'm much stronger than Markus Beyer."

Beyer, 31-2 (12), has been working with a psychologist, Dr. Eckhard Winderl, who helped him for his rematch victory over Sanavia, against whom he had previously lost on points. "The work I've done with Dr. Winderl has definitely benefited me," he insisted.

In the opening seconds against Nishizawa, Beyer sent the 38-year-old challenger to the floor with a well-executed left, but it was in the second round that the bout took an unexpected turn, stunning the crowd at the Oberfranken Halle. Nishizawa, 26-15-5 (14), who was supported by his six-year-old daughter at ringside, unleashed a right hand through Beyer's guard and the German went down, taking a mandatory eight-count from English referee John Keane. "I was caught, but not hurt," Beyer insisted.

He got over the effects of the punch quickly and, as the rounds wore on, he was increasingly in control of the fight, though he could not floor the challenger again. "I worked hard for this victory," said Beyer. "It was unbelievable the punches he took tonight." At the final bell, there was no disputing the verdict. Gale Van Hoy (USA) scored 116-111, Sergio Silvi (Italy) 117-111, and Francisco Vazquez Marcos (Spain) 118-109, all for the German. THE RING also scored for Beyer, 117-111.

Promoter Wilfried Sauerland won the purse bids for the Beyer-Green rematch with an offer of $2,149,000, fractionally more than the $2,111,000 bid by Green Machine Promotions. It was anticipated that the bout would take place in March in Germany.

Promoter: Wilfried Sauerland

(12-18-04)

Brian Doogan ■

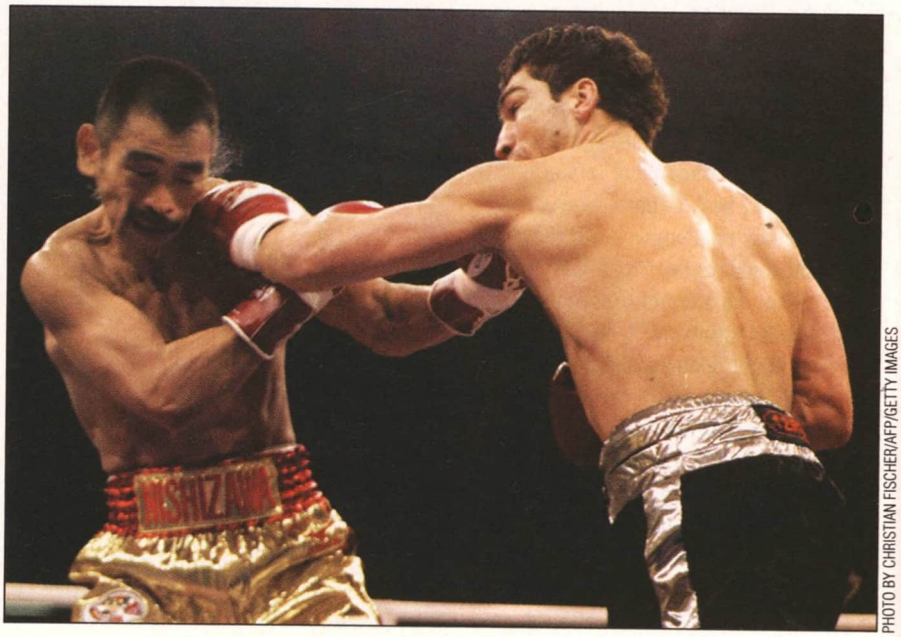


PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN FISCHER/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Nishizawa absorbs a left from Beyer

New Face

(Continued from page 20)

Fights. But he's not satisfied, not close. There is an angry eagerness about him before every fight, because someone is going to pay for his misfortune.

"We just had boxing, that was it. That was about the only positive thing I had in my life growing up," said Litzau, who still resides in East St. Paul, though in his own home now. "With my family, I suppose it was what straightened me out. Hell, you're talking to someone who each Christmas didn't know where he would be. My mother used to get drunk, my stepfather kicked her out of the house, and me and my brother used to have to wait for our grandmother to pick us up.

"The way I see it, I am lucky to still be alive. When I was 16, I was living on my own, living house to house. I used to see people shooting up heroin when I was 16. There was a lot of anger there; there still is a lot of anger there. I learned there are a lot of messed up people in the world."

So one time, after another family tirade, the brothers looked each other in the eyes and decided to take off—get out before something serious happened to them. Jason was 10, his brother, Allen, 11. The boys had a general idea of where their father, Curtis, lived in downtown St. Paul, 45 minutes away.

"We took a bus downtown to Minneapolis. I remember I was scared, man. It was crazy," recalled Jason. "I was worried about what was going to happen to us if we got caught, because we were two young kids and it was way past curfew. We got to our father's, and my father let us stay. We ran wild there. My father had problems at the time. I remember every five minutes, there was a cop that drove by where my father lived. Something was always going on."

So Litzau lived a transient life. He would travel, and move, and then move some more. One of Jason's more memorable stops happened to be at the Wilder Rec Center. Seeking any outlet to stem his sons' nonstop aggression, Curtis Litzau led them toward boxing. Jason and Allen walked into the rec center and took a slow, absorbing look around. They were the only two white kids in there, a fact quickly brought to their attention by a few snickers and under-the-breath remarks ending in "white boy."

At Wilder, Jason met grandfatherly trainer Jim Glancey, who would take the Litzau brothers to amateur tournaments all over the country. On these trips, the $25 per diem was just about the most money Jason had ever seen. Litzau would spend $5 on food and pocket the rest.

"The way Jason and Allen have come out is amazing to me because they've seen what alcohol and drugs can do to a family," said Litzau's trainer/manager, Bob Van Syckle. The Litzau brothers were homeless and living in a gym when Van Syckle met and signed them in October 2002. "Jason and Allen have a lot of good memories with the older guy (Glancey). I totally attribute the way they turned out to boxing, and the grandfatherly figure that stepped into their lives. He held it over their heads that if they screwed up, he'd take boxing away from them. Boxing really was all they had. They'd go to the gym on Christmas day because they didn't get anything for Christmas. They somehow came out with the right conclusions. You'll never see either Jason or Allen drink or smoke."

Now comes the next step: becoming a successful prize fighter. It's a goal that is certainly within Litzau's grasp. Jason TKO'd Juan Suazo, who had never been previously stopped, in six rounds on December 3 in Atlantic City, in front of the watchful eye of Main Events' Vice President Carl Moretti.

Litzau is stylish, plays to the crowd, and can be frustrating for an opponent to face because he showboats. The goal this year is a promotional contract and more TV exposure.

"There's no question we're interested," Moretti said. "Anytime you have a kid who fights an exciting style, he's attractive. He's a little cocky, and that's okay, and he's a good boxer-puncher. I would just like to see him in a matchup with another young, hungry prospect, instead of being in there against a faded veteran."

"We're talking to Main Events, and Carl Moretti does like Jason, or he wouldn't be putting Jason on these Main Events shows," Van Syckle said. "But we're definitely shooting for 2006. We'd like to get Jason up to 20 wins. Jason realizes it's all about entertainment."

Litzau also realizes it's about staying straight.

"Everyone that was close to me in one way or another wound up in prison," Litzau said. "I have two uncles in prison for assault, and one cousin is in for attempted murder. I was close to all of those guys. I'm not rich yet, but I feel like I'm living a good life right now."

That's no hustle. ■

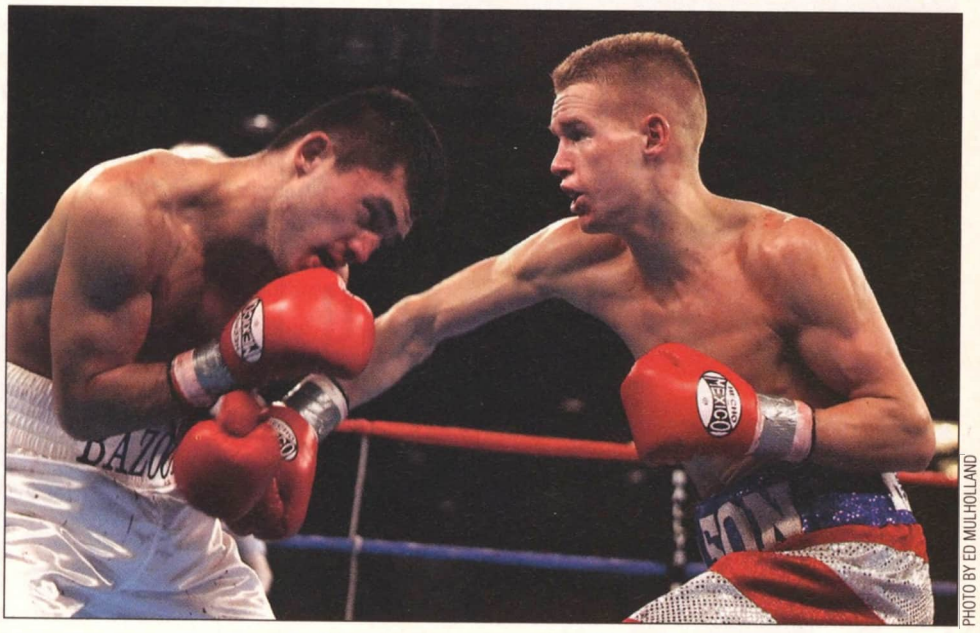


PHOTO BY ED MULHOLLAND

Litzau launches a right at Juan Suazo

The RING FLASHBACK

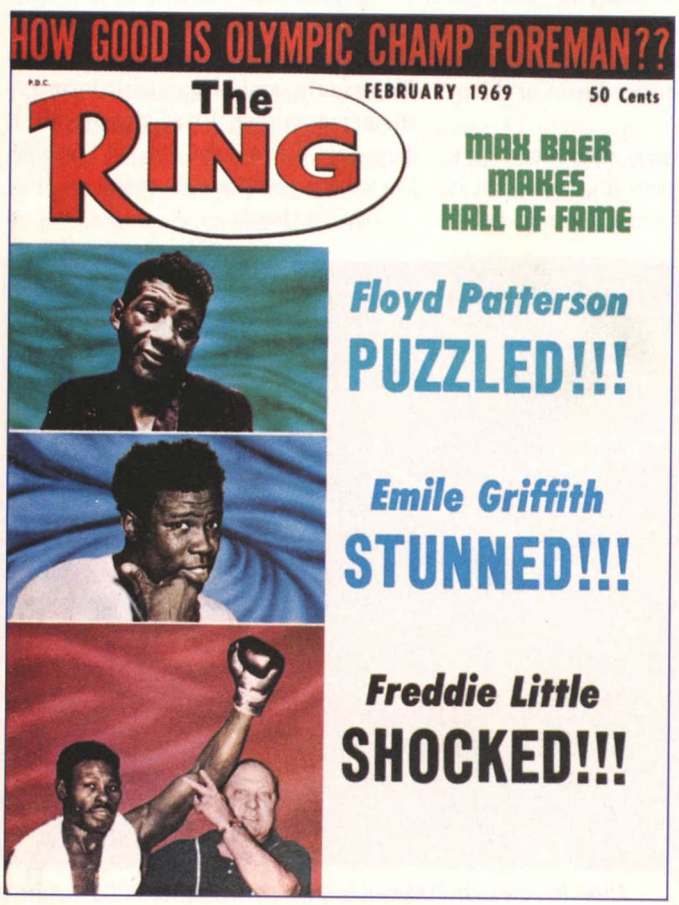
Through The Years With "The Bible Of Boxing"

FEBRUARY 1969

COVER STORY: "Fans Holler 'Help' While Officials Get Hot Blasts On All Sides" Think judges and referees receive a good dose of criticism today? Well, it's nothing new; they always have. But in this unusual case, 35 years ago, THE RING was asking boxing fans for some tolerance for the third man in the ring. Instead, this story placed some of the blame for incompetent referees on promoters and local commissions.

THE RING pointed out that inept officials were entrusted with judging fights because of the desire to help them advance to major assignments that they didn't merit in the first place. Another reason was that visiting fighters often wanted to protect themselves against prejudicial judging by demanding imported officials, who were sometimes not qualified or lacked the experience to arbitrate major events.

A couple of examples cited came in referee Harold Valan's controversial decision in favor of Jimmy Ellis over Floyd Patterson in Sweden. THE RING at the time received a number of letters from readers protesting the verdict.



A decision that was even more grievous came when American Freddie Little traveled to Rome, Italy, to face junior middleweight champion Sandro Mazzinghi. West German referee Herbert Tomser called the bout a no-contest after Mazzinghi did not answer the bell for the ninth round.

The bout took place under European Boxing Union rules, which stated that if a referee stopped a fight during the first half of a 15-round title bout, it is ruled a no-contest. But the fact was, the fight had already passed the halfway mark when Tomser erroneously ruled it a no-contest.

Finally, Emile Griffith received a shocker when referee Zack Clayton and two judges favored Stan "Kitten" Hayward over him in a fight in Philadelphia. Letters poured into THE RING supporting Griffith.

THE RING looked into each of these bouts and found no grounds for suspicion. What it did find, however, was a need for qualified officials in key fights.

"Too Many Heavy Champs Now, Says Amused Schmeling" Jimmy Ellis may have been raising his hands as the new WBA heavy-

WORLD CHAMPIONS

(for period ended December 20, 1968)

Heavyweight: Cassius Clay
Light Heavyweight: Bob Foster
Middleweight: Nino Benvenuti
Welterweight: Curtis Cokes
Junior Welterweight: Paul Fujii
Lightweight: Carlos Cruz
Junior Lightweight: Hiroshi Kobayashi
Featherweight: Vacant
Bantamweight: Lionel Rose
Flyweight: Chartchai Chionoi

Ellis shouldn't be considered a champ, Schmeling said

Baer was a Hall of Fame inductee

weight titlist, but he was not a champion, according to former heavyweight champ Max Schmeling, then 63. Schmeling was a little disturbed by the fact that there were three heavyweights considered champions at the time: Ellis (WBA), Joe Frazier (New York State Athletic Commission), and Muhammad Ali (recognized as champion by THE RING). Of the three, Schmeling said that he would rate Ali (whom he still called Cassius Clay) a better fighter than either Frazier or Ellis.

Schmeling went on to say that a prime Joe Louis would have beaten Ali, as would a prime time Rocky Marciano. "I don't think Clay would have hurt Marciano, but Rocky would have hurt him, and so would have Jack Dempsey," Schmeling said.

"Foreman, 19, Aspires To Success As Pro Champ" It may be hard to believe that the rotund, old George Foreman we know today was once a spry 19-year-old, young, energetic, and with hair. "Big George" was about to embark on his pro career after winning the heavyweight Olympic gold medal at the 1968 Games in Mexico City.

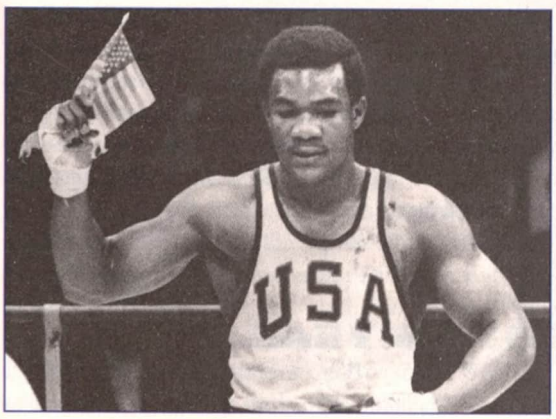
Foreman spoke about continuing to work at Job Corps and planned on studying sociology at Chabot Junior College. In the story, THE RING cited a number of Olympic heavyweight champions, like Pete Rademacher and Joe Frazier, who immediately turned pro after the Olympics.

"Baer, O'Brien, Hyer In Hall Of Fame" The Boxing Hall of Fame, headquartered at the time at THE RING's offices in New York City, welcomed the inductions of three new members: former heavyweight champ Max Baer, light heavyweight king Philadelphia Jack O'Brien, and Jacob Hyer, who claimed the American bareknuckle heavyweight championship by defeating England's Tom Beasley in 1816.

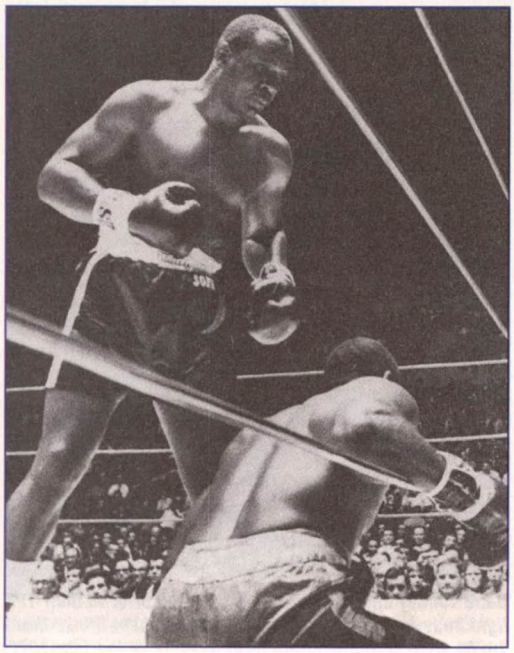
Baer was named on 229 of 302 ballots cast by sports editors, boxing writers, and radio and television commentators. To be inducted, candidates had to be listed on 75 percent of the ballots (227 of 302). Baer just edged out former welterweight and middleweight champ Carmen Basilio.

There was no doubting the inclusion of O'Brien, who knocked out Bob Fitzsimmons in 1905 to claim the light heavyweight title. The induction of Hyer made him and his son, Tom, the first father-son combination to be elected to the Hall.

"Rischer Easy For Liston in Three" Former heavyweight champ Sonny Liston was still plying his trade, though in front of much smaller crowds. Looking ponderous, Liston still took apart overmatched Roger Rischer at 2:23 of the third round, before 4,213 in Pittsburgh. Even though Liston made Rischer look like a punching bag for three rounds, landing left hooks and overhand rights at will, the victory did little to boost his sagging career. ■



Foreman's Olympic gold raised flag and curiosity



Liston made easy work of Rischer

Come Out Writing

Letters may be edited for reasons of space and clarity. Send your comments to Come Out Writing, The Ring, P.O. Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. Or e-mail letters to comeoutwriting@yahoo.com. E-mailed letters will include the writer's e-mail address unless a city and state of origin is provided.

DUELING ERAS

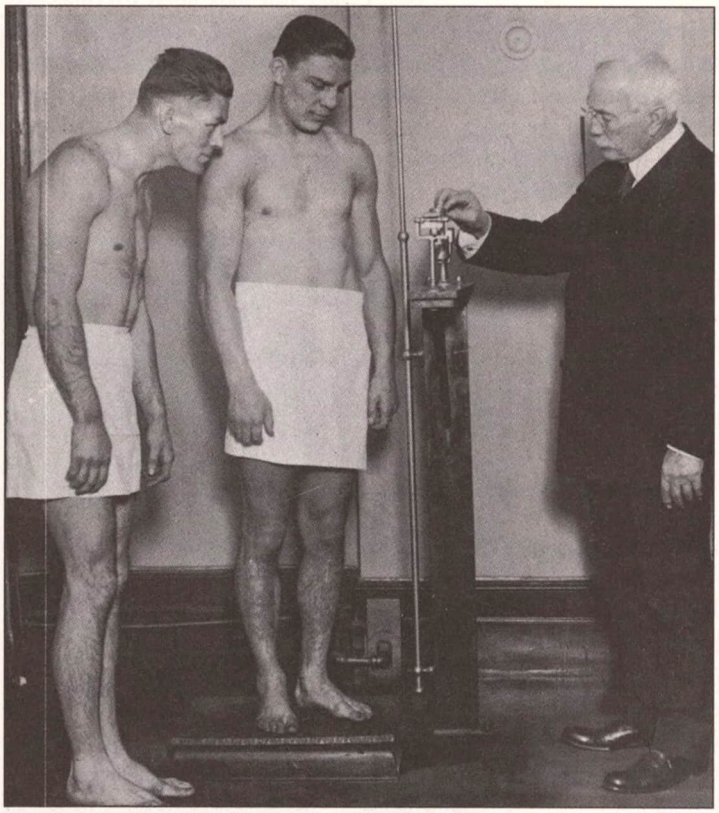
In his article summing up Roy Jones' potential legacy (The Ring, Winter 2005), Jeff Ryan was musing on how Jones might have done in what he saw as the greatest era of light heavies. I must say I disagree with Ryan's choice of the late-1970s as that era. While that would be my second choice, I believe that the mid-1920s featured considerably better talent. I'm talking about Gene Tunney, Harry Greb, Georges Carpentier, Battling Levinsky, Mike McTigue, Jimmy Slattery, Mickey Walker, Paul Berlenbach, Jack Delaney, Tommy Loughran, Tommy Gibbons, William Stribling, and Battling Siki, all of whom were operating at light heavyweight between 1922 and 1925. Do Michael Spinks, Dwight Muhammad Qawi, Matthew Saad Muhammad, Victor Galindez, Yaqui Lopez, Marvin Johnson, and Mike Rossman really compare?

KEN BRIDGHAM
Pittsburgh, PA

HATTON ON HOLD

It seems that every week we have a Ricky Hatton watch. This is where we get news that Hatton is about to fight one of any countless number of junior welterweight contenders. His management seems hell-bent on convincing the best fighters in the world to come to Hatton's home turf and face him. Wake up, Ricky! The only way to ever prove you are the best in the world is to fight in the United States. Hatton needs to assert himself. He is wasting his precious youth by not taking on bigger name opponents now! Does he and his management already know something about him that we have all wondered about? Will he slice up worse than Henry Cooper if and when he faces some of the top fighters in the best division in boxing?

JAMES W. WAYLAND
jameswwayland@aol.com



Gene Tunney checks Harry Greb's weight prior to their 1923 bout for the American light heavyweight title. Reader Ken Bridgham thinks that the 175-pounders of the 1920s were superior to the light heavies of the late-1970s, which columnist Jeff Ryan believes was the greatest crop of light heavyweights of all-time.

DIRECTION AND CLARITY

I think your concept of issuing a Ring magazine belt to fighters you consider to be the genuine world champion in each division is a good one. The sport (business?) of boxing is becoming more confusing each week, with numerous governing bodies popping up for their two-pence worth. Now, at least the fans can look to The Ring beltholder for some direction and clarity.

MARK MASSOW
London, England

FLOYD'S YEAR

I believe 2005 will be a breakout year for Floyd Mayweather. He continues to show that he is not afraid to take on the best competition out there with fights with Arturo

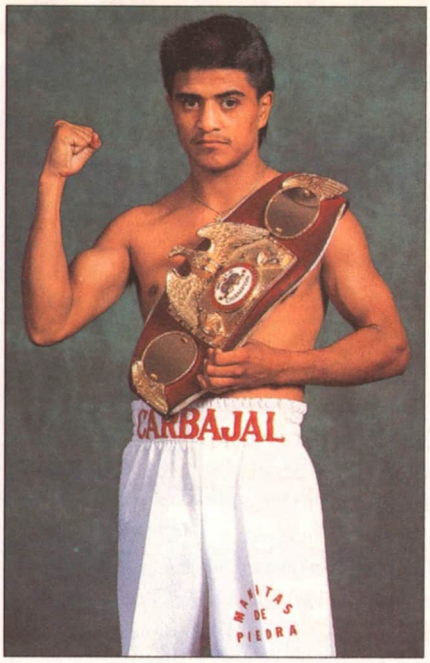
Gatti, Miguel Cotto, Kostya Tszyu, and perhaps Cory Spinks in the plans for this year. Unlike many of his contemporaries in the fabled pound-for-pound ratings who are past their peaks and suffered shocking knockout losses in 2004, Floyd may be just reaching his prime. And he is, without question, the most gifted fighter in the sport right now. Look for Mayweather to have a big year and knock Bernard Hopkins off the pedestal as the best fighter, pound-for-pound.

ANDREW KANG
Los Angeles, CA

NO CALL TO THE HALL

This is the first time I have ever written in my 10 years of reading THE RING. The article that provoked me to write was Eric Raskin's "10 Burning Questions For 2005" in the April issue. Raskin wrote that nobody that great retired in 1999, making them eligible for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame. Excuse me! Has he ever heard of Michael Carbajal? I expect Carbajal and his rival Humberto "Chiquita" Gonzalez to be inducted into the IBHOF this year.

TONY BERRY
Detroit, MI



Michael Carbajal poses with the IBF junior featherweight belt he won by stopping Muangchai Kittikasem in 1990. Carbajal, who retired in 1999, was not on the ballot for induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame this year, which is sure to upset reader Tony Berry.

[Editor's note: Carbajal wasn't on the ballot, and neither he nor Gonzalez was elected this year. See page 8 for the list of all 2005 inductees.]

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY

After watching the Samuel Peter-Jeremy Williams fight, I must say I am completely appalled by the manner in which Jim Gray and Showtime handled the postfight interview with Williams. It was downright crude and insensitive. Here was a man who was in a serious situation, just knocked unconscious, and in obvious distress. Yet the first thing they do once he barely recovers is show him footage of the knockout.

When a boxer gets knocked out, he is forced to recognize his fistic mortality in the cruelest of ways. This can be a very painful experience, especially when it happens in front of the entire world. Force-feeding Williams that image only added insult to injury. In response to the replay, Williams could only say, "I'm halfway embarrassed by that … " No kidding. The crew at Showtime should have known better.

This doesn't happen all the time, of course, as fighters are sometimes asked beforehand if they wish to view such replays. Either way, by being put on the spot and having a TV monitor shoved in their face, they really have no choice but to instinctively comply. My question, however, is: Who in the hell wants to see themselves knocked out? They used to spare fighters this indignity; now it's become more prevalent, HBO included. I sincerely hope Jay Larkin (Showtime) and Ross Greenburg (HBO) put an end to this degradation immediately.

NOLAND PORTILLO
Bakersfield, CA

REASONABLE DISAGREEMENT

I support THE RING's new championship policy wholeheartedly, even more so now that you've eliminated the sanctioning bodies altogether. But that being said, I have to agree with those who argue the legitimacy of Vitali Klitschko vs. Corrie Sanders as being for the vacant RING heavyweight belt. While the match did meet your criteria of matching the number-one contender and the number-three contender under certain circumstances, and that number-two contender Chris Byrd had not been very impressive vs. Fres Oquendo and Andrew Golota, I believe that those circumstances were not strong enough to override a box-off between the number-one and number-two contenders. While I agree that it's good for boxing to have a heavyweight champion, it looks to me that there was a bit of a rush to crown a new champion.

DARCY LAURIE
willywasfast@hotmail.com ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF SPORTFIVE

Vitali Klitschko displays THE RING heavyweight championship belt he won by stopping Corrie Sanders in Los Angeles last April. Reader Darcy Laurie believes THE RING acted hastily in recognizing Klitschko as the new champ.

LOOKING AHEAD

By Eric Raskin

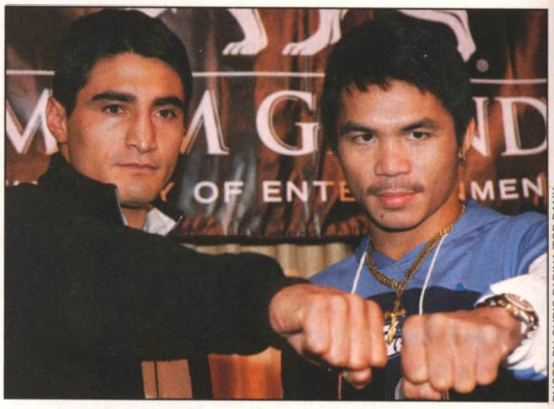


PHOTO BY CHRIS FARINA/TOP RANK

Morales-Pacquiao: Will aim their fists at each other March 19

JUNIOR LIGHT DELIGHT

Sometimes, a good fight falling through turns out to be a great thing. Just ask **Glen Johnson**, whose storybook 2004 campaign might have gone a whole different direction if he and **Joe Calzaghe** had finalized their deal to fight. For featherweight champion **Manny Pacquiao**, the fact that **Juan Manuel Marquez** was making negotiations for their rematch difficult probably seemed like a bummer at first. Until a bigger fight, for more money, with a higher upside, at probably no greater risk, came along. Now, Pacquiao is scheduled to face superstar **Erik Morales** on March 19 in an HBO Pay-Per-View fight from the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, and he couldn't care less—at least for the time being—about Marquez.

"I'm excited to fight Erik Morales because he's one of the greatest fighters in the world. It's my honor to fight him," Pacquiao said at the press conference announcing the fight. It's also his honor to pocket as much as $1.75-million, depending on PPV revenues—reportedly the largest purse ever earned by a Filipino boxer, and nearly twice the $900,000 he was expected to make against Marquez.

Many insiders were expecting that Morales would make a fourth fight with **Marco Antonio Barrera** his top priority to open 2005, but, like Pacquiao, he's thrilled to be a part of this unexpected superfight.

"Manny Pacquiao is a great, great warrior. I'm very happy about this," Morales said. "After this fight, everyone is going to wonder who Barrera is. I'm going to take care of my business and forget him."

The fight will take place in Morales' current division, junior lightweight. It's a near certainty that Pacquiao will be giving away size come fight time, but so did Barrera when he fought "El Terrible" last November, and we all know how that turned out. Pacquiao rates to have a noticeable speed advantage, and his trainer, **Freddie Roach**, thinks it's a better style matchup for "Pac-Man" than a rematch with the clever Marquez would have been.

"Marquez is more of a counterpuncher, and Morales will fight you and exchange with you," Roach said in predicting a late knockout for his charge. "Morales has been a great fighter and so forth, but he's not a young guy coming up anymore. He's probably not as fast or hits as hard as he used to … and we're going to take advantage of that. We're going to fight every minute of every round and make this guy fight at our pace and not his."

"If we get into a fast rhythm, that's okay with me," Morales countered. "If we get into a slow rhythm, that's okay too."

Pacquiao also used the "s" word—"slow"—when talking about Morales' last fight, against Barrera.

"He looked good, but a little slower than before," said Pacquiao in his dramatically improved English. "I know he has power, but me too, I have power."

And he'll wield some serious power if he wins this fight, having already dominated Barrera in November '03. Supremacy in this new golden age of featherweights is at stake every time any combination of Pacquiao, Morales, Barrera, and Marquez clash, and considering how exceptional most of the fights so far between these four pound-for-pound entrants have been, Morales-Pacquiao is shaping up as one of those rare PPVs bound to be worth its price tag.

"Two of the best fighters fighting each other, that's what people want to see," Roach said at the January 12 press conference. "We're nine weeks away from the fight, and the buzz is crazy already."

LISTEN UP

The Morales-Pacquiao PPV undercard will feature an awesome fight for truly hardcore fans: The top flyweight in the world, **Pongsaklek Wonjongkam**, defending his belt against the number-one junior fly, **Jorge Arce**. Stylistically, it can't miss … Barrera, left out of the Morales-Pacquiao fun, may face **Scott Harrison** sometime in the spring … **Felix Trinidad** was originally supposed to fight on that March 19 date; now it looks like "Tito" will go on April 9 … **Andrew Golota** is signed to face **Lamon Brewster** on March 12 on HBO, marking Golota's third straight shot at a heavyweight alphabet belt … **David Tua** will return from a two-year hiatus on March 31, and as disappointing as Tua's been in recent years, the heavyweight division could certainly use the slugging Samoan. ■

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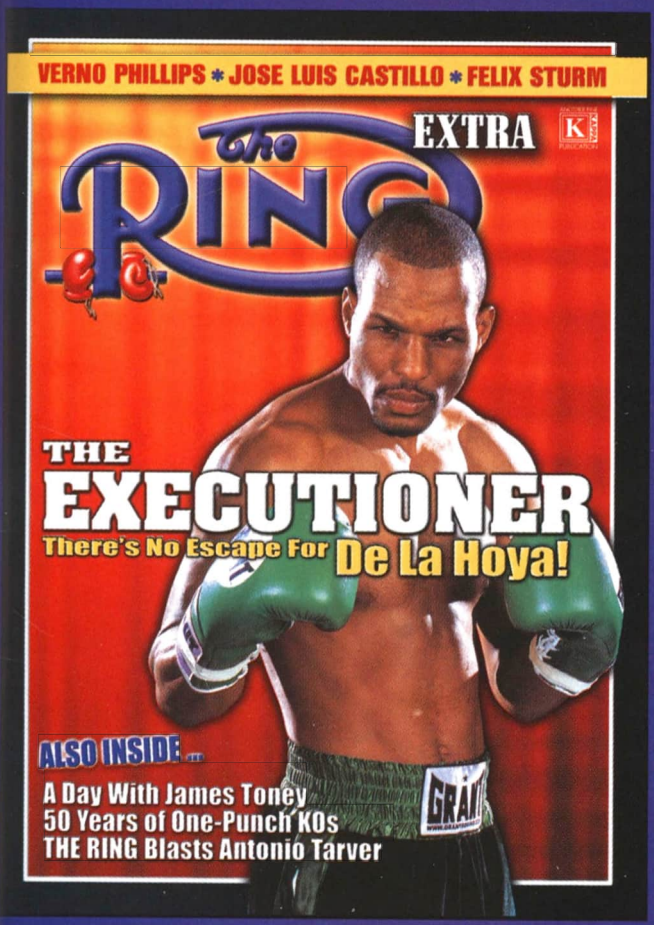

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